Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

FEBRUARY 1952
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WHERE WERE WE? by L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

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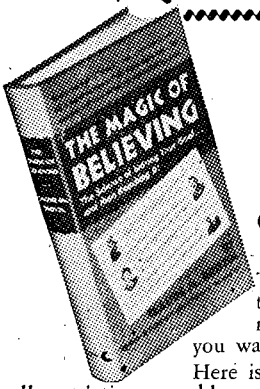

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SCIENCE FICTION

Editor.....H. L. GOLD

Assistant Editor
EVELYN PAIGE

Art Director
W. I. VAN DER POEL

Production Manager
J. J. De MARIO

Advertising Manager
JOHN ANDERSON

●

Cover by
RICHARD POWERS
Illustrating
WHERE WERE WE?
and WHERE TO?

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Open Letters

WRITES Howard Kaminsky, 330 Church Avenue, Woodmere, N. Y.: "As you point out, prediction is not the purpose of science fiction; the fact is that human society evolves, as does all life, by the emergence of novel integrations, reducible to their original components only by backwards logic. When conjecture is extended millenia into the future, the chance of hitting anything even faintly related to future reality (social patterns, individual motivations, cultural principles, etc.) are almost nothing. *All* science fiction begins and ends with the present—that is, it extrapolates present tendencies into an environment constructed out of present cultural components, or their opposites. The insights achieved by this method are not inconsiderable, but let us not fool ourselves as to what the insights see into."

I don't, of course, want to spoil the point of the articles by de Camp and Heinlein in this issue. However, finding the significance of science fiction is urgent now, when it has suddenly become so important to so many people.

The interpretations, as usual, are glib and superficial:

• Science fiction is a substitute for those who can't accept mystic prophecy.

• By creating fictitious futures, either on Earth or in space, it assures readers that civilization will survive.

• By providing ghastly cataclysms and police states, it convinces the reader that the present isn't so bad, after all.

If these are factors of importance, they are, it seems to me, secondary to Mr. Kaminsky's thesis:

• "*All* science fiction begins and ends with the present—that is, it extrapolates present tendencies into an environment constructed out of present cultural components, or their opposites."

If science fiction were in the business of prediction, it should have forecast: the release of atomic power *before* the development of rocketry; our ability *right now* to wipe venereal disease and insects off the planet; the fact that 90% of all prescriptions *today* could not have been filled only *ten years ago;* the enormous growth of—science fiction itself!

By creating fictitious futures, it does no more than reveal the unsuspectedly healthy optimism

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that exists in our own era. In other words, rather than escape, whether into time or space, science fiction explores *present* positive tendencies, outlooks, hopes. I'm sure some of these will come true, but even that doesn't matter. What counts is that there is a strong core of health in this sick-seeming period of ours, *and science fiction often finds it.*

Even the ghastly cataclysms and police states that science fiction creates, presumably to convince the reader that the present isn't so bad, reveal this healthy attitude. *We are willing to explore.* If we can get back, fine, but we'll risk one-way trips.

Science fiction is no awesome cerebral escape machine. It tells us about ourselves and our era. What it tells is usually encouraging—and extremely entertaining. Isn't that enough? Which branch of literature offers more?

FROM Graham B. Stone, Box 61, The Union, University of Sydney, NSW, Australia, comes an appeal: "We are planning a science fiction fan convention in Sydney, weekend of March 22nd, 1952. I can be reached at the above address. Fans in Melbourne could look up D. H. Tuck at 13 Gordon Street, Footscray; in Perth, R. N. Dard at 232 James Street."

I was in the Pacific as a combat engineer, and, although science fiction wasn't as urgent to me as some other matters at the time, I do know that readers Down Under live on science fiction K-rations. I hope this mention helps to end the drought.

Mr. Stone also suggests borrowing certain outmoded art layouts from another magazine. His suggestion happens to coincide with several dozen angry letters asking whether we aren't equally angry over the "shameless lifting" of our cover design by that same magazine.

No, we're not angry, though we would like to know when we may have it back again. We are developing some other ideas; would the magazine in question prefer to have us send them over now, or wait and see how they work out after publication?

It is also amusing to note that *Prelude to Space* (GALAXY *Science Fiction* Novel No. 3) was the only book reviewed in that magazine which did not have a publisher, and *The Stars, Like Dust* (serialized in GALAXY as *Tyrann*) startled its reviewer because the book did not originate there. The reviewer will go on being startled. GALAXY, of course, will continue to credit periodicals in which stories first appeared — including our unsportsmanlike imitator.

—H. L. GOLD

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WHERE WERE WE?

By L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Here, sorrily, is the miserable record of science fiction's early predictions. Consider it well—will our record be better?

ABOUT the middle of the 20th century, Gabriel Weltstein lands in New York: a young man from a Swiss colony in Africa, who has come thither to arrange the sale of his colony's main product, wool. As he has led a simple bucolic life, the big city fascinates and awes him. The streets are roofed over with glass, illuminated by magnetic lights, and jammed with pedestrians. There is little wheeled traffic save the carriages of the world-ruling banker aristocracy. Overhead weave elevated railways and airlines. The latter are of two kinds: inverted monorail cars suspended from a cable which in turn is held up by captive balloons; and great dirigible airships propelled by electricity, with sails for auxiliary motive power and lifeboats equipped with parachutes. One of these latter monsters can fly to London in 36 hours.

When Gabriel sits down in a restaurant, he sees a "mirror" (like a television screen) on which the menu appears. After making his choice he presses numbered buttons below the screen, and

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presently the table opens up and his meal rises from below. When he presses another button a facsimile of the day's newspaper appears on the screen. Although the season is a New York summer, the restaurant is cool. A balloon floats overhead, tethered to the restaurant by a double canvas tube through which hot air is exhausted to the stratosphere while cold air is sucked down from the heights to replace it.

Later Gabriel meets other wonders: the municipal heating system which gets hot water from the depths of the earth; the pneumatic-tube network by which a subscriber can communicate almost instantly with any other in the city, the suicide houses where people are given a painless end, and so on. Then comes the day when he snatches a beggar from under the hoofs of the coach-horses of one of the wicked bankers. The beggar turns out to be a leader of the oppressed masses, and Gabriel is launched upon his adventures.

An alternate-time track? Not exactly. This is the New York of the present time as described 60 years ago by Ignatius Donnelly in his prophetic novel *Caesar's Column*, which sold over a million copies.

The enthusiastic Ignatius (1831-1901) should be familiar to all science fiction addicts, for, besides writing three novels in this genre, he converted the lost Atlantic from a speculation of scholars into a popular cult. His *Atlanti: The Antediluvian World* ran through 50 editions and is still in print. In *The Great Cryptogram* he performed the same service for the theory that Bacon wrote the plays of Shakespeare.

Born in Philadelphia of Irish parents, Donnelly studied law and migrated to Minnesota, where he led an active political career, becoming lieutenant-governor at 28 and being one of the founders of the Populist Party.

Time has played an ironical trick on Donnelly. Many of the political measures he advocated, deemed dreadfully radical at the time, are now taken for granted. Donnelly is remembered, however, not for these sound ideas but for his promotion of the pseudo-scientific and pseudo-scholarly cults of Atlantism and Baconianism!

DONNELLY'S three novels, *Caesar's Colum, Dr. Huguet,* and *The Golden Bottle,* were published in the early 90s. The first deals with the uprising of the masses against a Jewish oligarchy. (Donnelly showed anti-Semitic animus in this story, which he later seemed to have outgrown.) However, the masses have become so degraded by their

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servitude that they kill off their own more enlightened leaders, and the world sinks into barbarism. *Dr. Huguet* deals with the Negro problem by the now-familiar device of transposing souls. To make his hero appreciate the plight of the American Negro, Donnelly puts him into the body of one. And *The Golden Bottle* is an alchemical dream wherein the narrator is given a liquid that turns base metal to gold. By this power he becomes a financial titan, and conquers and reforms the world.

Caesar's Column is one of many stories written between 1880 and 1910 which try to foresee the shape of things in mid or late 20th century. We can, therefore, for the first time in history, enjoy the sensation of seeing ourselves as our ancestors predicted us.

Many of these narratives are pretty poor fiction by modern standards. Thus Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), a prophecy of an ideal Socialist future, which had an enormous sale at the time, is unreadably dull. Bellamy puts his hero to sleep in 1887 and awakens him in 2000; after that, all that happens is that the hero listens to interminable lectures from people on the social and economic organization of 2000. Yet even the worst of these yarns sheds light on man's ability to foresee his future. We often hear of such successful prophecies: Jack London's *The Iron Heel* is cited as a forecast of Fascism, while it is said that an inventor was once denied a patent on a periscope because Jules Verne had described it in detail in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea.*

But you can't prove prophetic insight by citing successes alone, for if you make enough guesses about the future of anything you will make some hits by luck. What, then, of the failures? For instance, while Donnelly in *Caesar's Column* foresaw air travel, and while his pneumatic tubes and magnetic lights have analogues in the real world, he anticipated nothing corresponding to the automobile.

Many writers of futuristic novels devoted much space to the mechanical wonders of the future world. They made some good hits and some even remarkable misses. In these old novels we come across the transatlantic telephone, the electric light, and the flashlight in *The King's Men* by Grant, O'Reilly, Dale and Wheelwright (1884), a lively tale despite the extraordinary number of collaborators that wrote it. It is a story of an abortive conspiracy to restore King George V to the throne of the British Republic. This king is fat, foolish, and lecherous, quite different from the

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frigidly correct and conventional man who actually occupied the British throne under that title. But with all their improvements the authors still fill their 20th-century scenes with horse-drawn carriages and servants in powdered wigs.

OR take *A. D. 2000* by Lt. A. M. Fuller, USA (1890). Lieutenant Fuller, like Bellamy, puts his hero to sleep and awakens him in 2000, to find electric clocks like ours, a New York subway system not unlike the real one, and a national newspaper printed in many places by a "sympathetic telegraph"—a kind of radio-teletypewriter. Street traffic is a mixture of horse-buggies and "electric drags;" underground pneumatic railways span the continent. Air travel is by dirigible balloon or airship, and he sends his hero off to discover the North Pole in one.

Similarly Frank Stockton of lady-or-tiger fame, in *The Great Stone of Sardis* (1898), had the Pole reached by submarine, as Sir Hubert Wilkins once tried to do in fact. The story combines considerable imagination and some of Stockton's folksy humor, with glaring logical lapses and a feeble knowledge of the science actually of Stockton's own time. Even Bellamy, who paid little attention to technical matters, credited his future Americans with a device like Muzak.

Several authors foresaw the wide use of aluminum—but at the same time foresaw the wide use of moving sidewalks and monorail trains, which have not materialized. The latter were to be of two kinds: one suspended from an overhead rail like the real interurban line at Wupperthal in the Ruhr, Germany, which is still running. (Recently it had a slight mishap when a publicity man gave a baby elephant a ride. The beast, disliking the motion, plunged out a door into the Wupper River, from which it was recovered indignant but unharmed.) The other kind stood on a single rail, being kept upright by gyroscopes. The streamlined Diesel-electric train was not foreseen, though the Diesel engine was patented in 1892 and the streamlined train in 1865.

In general, pre-automobile authors missed the automobile completely, despite occasional mention of electric bicycles and the like; or at least they had no conception of its importance in modern economics, social custom, city planning, road-building, and traffic management. They also missed motion pictures, and the radio and related electrical communications (teletype, television, radar, etc.).

In the matter of aircraft, some

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like Grant *et al.*, Bellamy, and Stockton ignored them. Others bet on the dirigible airship instead of the airplane—a poor choice. In their prophecies of aircraft these authors illustrate one of my points; that prophets are fairly safe with generalities, but their score gets progressively worse as they try to become more particular. H. G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling both tried their hands at detailed aeronautical prophecies with amusing results.

In *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) Wells awakens his "sleeper," Graham, about 2100. Graham's money has accumulated by compound interest until he owns most of the world, which is ruled in his name by the "Council" of trustees of his fortune. There are "aeroplanes" (large, fast transport aircraft with wings in tandem) and "aeropiles" (small insectlike fliers for private use). Their military potential has never been developed because the Council came into power and stopped all war before they were perfected.

By 1907 aircraft had been reduced to reality, and in Well's *The War in the Air,* published that year, Germany sets out to conquer the United States with a fleet of rigid airships of the type that Count Zeppelin (who, by the way, served as a Union officer in the U. S. Civil War had been developing. These craft are accompanied by a swarm of parasite airplanes, or *Drachtenflieger,* suspended from them as the U. S. Navy actually did with the unfortunate *Akron* and *Macon.*

FIRST the Germans sink the American fleet with bombs from the airplanes. The idea of a cheap little airplane manned by a cheap little aviator sinking a huge expensive battleship appeals to the average reader's David-and-Goliath prejudice had long fascinated speculative writers. Like many prophecies, the idea turned out to be true, but not the whole truth—as witness the Battle of the Philippine Sea, where the Japanese threw 404 carrier planes against the American fleet and lost them all without seriously harming a single ship.

Then Well's airships went on to destroy New York City and seize strategic points about the nation. Meanwhile Britain and France attacked Germany and an Asiatic Empire attacked everybody. The Asiatics used flattened airships (like oversize flying saucers) and swarms of one-man ornithopters. The pilots of the latter landed and attacked their antagonists with samurai swords —not so funny as it sounds, for in World War II Japanese aviators actually wore such swords in

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their cockpits, and Russian aviators are now said to climb into theirs with Cossack sabers.

Finally civilization was smashed and everything simmered down to barbarism—a favorite theme with Wells, who never realized that with the increase in powers of destruction has gone an almost as impressive increase in powers of organization and reconstruction.

In a later and inferior novel (too much editorializing and not enough story). *The World Set Free* (1914), Wells foresaw the destruction of cities by atomic bombs dropped (by hand!) from airplanes. This time civilization was saved from collapse when the King of England and the French Ambassador to the United States got together and called a conference of heads of nations to set up a world government, as people in real life have made two fumbling, half-hearted, and not very successful efforts to do.

Kipling's short *With the Night Mail* (1909) bets on the airship for long-range transportation, but assumes that its lift will be greatly increased in proportion to its size by "Fluery's gas." Mechanically, Kipling's aircraft have little to do with modern airliners, but his description of aerial traffic control has a ring of reality. And being, like Wells, a master of narrative technique, his tale is infinitely more readable than those of amateurs like Bellamy. None of these early aeronautical prophets foresaw the nature of aerial combat: their aircraft fight with rifles, or by ramming, or by grasping each other with steel jaws.

In the sphere of culture most prophetic novels are weak. Developments in the arts are largely ignored. Most of them assume us to be wearing the beards, stiff collars, and street-sweeping dresses of late-Victorian days; when they do hazard a clothes-prophecy, they put the men in knee-breeches or the like. No doubt the authors would be amazed to see an American street in summer with the men hatless, coatless, and tieless, and the women in dresses of knee or calf length, or even (in suburbs and resorts) in shorts and halters. They would be horrified by a modern bathing beach, and the flourishing nudist movement would reduce them to gibbering incoherence.

WHILE some prophets mentioned the emancipation of women, none grasped the lengths to which it has gone, with lady senators and army colonels. They never dreamed of "good" women with makeup, smoking, swearing, and drinking—acts which in their days were restricted to what they called "unfortunate females."

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Their heroines shriek and swoon at the slightest shock in true Victorian tradition. None foresaw the most important Western cultural developments of late decades: the grotesque prohibition episode in America with its resulting rise in organized crime; the decline in the influence of religion; the rise in the living standards of most lower-income groups; and the stupendous rise in the rate of divorce and remarriage.

Well, not quite. Victor Rousseau (Emmanuel) in his *The Messiah of the Cylinder* (1917) foresaw a world ruled by an atheistic Socialist tyranny which encourages such horrors as divorce and birth control. However, the pious Christian Russians come to the rescue of the oppressed Good People, destroy the Socialist armies in a war fought with death-rays and airplanes with jaws, and restore the old-fashioned virtues. That's right—the Russians!

Which brings us to political prophecies. The authors tried everything. The world may be happy under a purified Capitalism, or groaning under a Capitalist dictatorship. Sometimes Socialism has brought about a Utopian millenium (Bellamy); sometimes it has engendered a tyranny as bad as that of the real U.S.S.R. The prophets erred in seeking political simplicity, whereas reality has been infinitely various, inconsistent, and untidy. The authors have repeatedly made Great Britain into a republic or a Socialist dictatorship, but none foresaw the present mild bumbling democratic Socialist monarchy, a more contradictory conglomeration than any author ever imagined. Several writers have annexed all of North America to the United States, to the intense annoyance of Canadians and Mexicans who think they're doing all right and have no desire to join the Yanquis.

Usually the prophets (being Americans and Britons—I haven't read much of the Continental literature) have either proclaimed or hoped for the triumph of democracy, with a few exceptions. That delightful old imperialist Kipling put the world under an irresponsible Aerial Board of Control, while Lieutenant Fuller reformed the United States along the lines one would expect from a naively well-meaning military man: He had a single political party and got rid of such disorderly manifestations of democracy as juries and labor unions.

And what of war? The earlier prophets failed to foresee the mechanization and complexity of modern warfare; while some introduced airplanes, most retained horse cavalry. So did the Russian Red Army, but not without ex-

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tensive modernization. The tank was foreseen only in two shorts, one by Wells (*The Land Ironclads*, 1903) and the other by Colonel Swinton of the Royal Engineers, who was one of the actual inventors of the tank.

For first-class war prophecies we have to come to later times: to Hector Bywater's *The Great Pacific War* (1925) and Floyd Gibbon's *The Red Napoleon* (1929). Bywater, a British naval expert, told of an American-Japanese war of 1931-3. In many respects it followed the course of the real one: the Japanese took Guam and the Philippines; then we took Truk, Angaur, and retook the Philippines, brought the Japanese fleet to bay, and defeated it.

Bywater, trying to be conservative, underestimated the range and striking power of modern fleets, and vastly underestimated the power of the airplane. Amphibious operations and new warship construction play but little part in his war. In his preface he says: "It would have been easy, for example, to bring the Japanese battle fleet to Hawaii . . . but to do so would have been to expose the narrative to the well-merited ridicule of informed critics." Shades of Pearl Harbor! Of course in 1931 the airplane was not so effective as a decade later, and landing-craft had not even been invented. Prophecy should, however, by rights anticipate such developments.

GIBBONS tells of the nearly successful effort of Ivan Karakhan, Stalin's successor, to conquer the world in order to establish communism and to abolish racial inequality. During 1932-6 his armies overrun all the Old World and then, using the European and Japanese fleets, he hurls great expeditions across the oceans to Mexico and both coasts of Canada to attack the United States. If Bywater underestimated the possibilities of such operations, Gibbons greatly overestimated them. But his climactic naval battle is more nearly in accord with technical possibilities than Bywater's; the American surface fleet is outnumbered, but American superiority in submarines and airplanes turns the tide.

Gibbons's shortcomings are ideological. In decrying the Red Menace he overlooked the Fascist Menace, destined to make an earlier (though not necessarily more dangerous) attempt at world conquest. And he makes his villain Karakhan call enlightenedly for racial equality and the brotherhood of man, like most modern statesmen, while Gibbons himself appeals to his readers' basest prejudices by ranting

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about the "yellow hordes." Both Gibbons and Bywater thought the Japanese-Americans of Hawaii would revolt; actually, in World War II, they provided the U. S. Army with loyal soldiers whose combat records were magnificent.

Thus the later Victorian prophetic story-writers managed to be right in a few broad and simple respects in their prophecies of the latter half of the 20th century. They foresaw that the world would become more mechanized, populous, and complicated; that Socialism would grow and would attain power in some countries; that faster transportation, especially by air, would affect men's lives.

As they got more specific and detailed, though, they went further astray, and some important developments they overlooked pretty generally—the automobile, radio, and motion picture; the internal combustion engine in its many forms; prohibition, birth control, and wide-spread divorce; the fading away of the old Judeo-Christian nudity tabu; and so on. Their ratio of success is little greater than that to be expected by luck; it seems greater because we remember the successful forecasts and forget the wild guesses.

The science fiction of the present appears to be considerably better grounded scientifically, sociologically and psychologically, in its higher forms. Even if we cannot point to any one story and say with confidence, here is the real future, the mere concept of a different future is an enormous advance. When the Martians land, or tyranny clamps down on the world, or we bomb ourselves into barbarism, science fiction readers at least won't rush about crying: "It's impossible! It just can't be!" They'll have been through it all before.

The possibility, in fact, if we judge by the older prophecies, is that we'll turn out to have been too conservative. Not only pessimistically but otherwise, for science fiction also envisions happy futures as well as doomed ones. It will be interesting, to put it calmly, to see what some citizens of 2000 A. D. will say in reviewing the stories in *Galaxy Science Fiction*. I'd rather like to be one of them.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

By simply existing today, we can see how far our science fiction ancestors' prophecies were from the astonishing reality of the present. But remember—they lacked the scientific techniques we control and could only hope and guess. Utilizing modern methods of extrapolation, Robert A. Heinlein indicates, in the next article, what—and what not—to expect in the year 2,000 A.D.

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WHERE TO?

By
ROBERT A.
HEINLEIN

The coming events casting their shadows before them do not need any microscopes to be seen—they need reducing glasses!

MOST science fiction consists of big-muscled stories about adventures in space, atomic wars, invasions by extraterrestrials, and such. All very well—but now we will take time out for a look at ordinary homelife half a century hence.

Except for tea leaves and other magical means, the only way to guess at the *future* is by examining the *present* in the light of the *past*. Let's go back half a century and visit your grandmother before we attempt to visit your grandchildren.

1900: Mr. McKinley is president and the airplane has not yet been invented. We'll knock on the door of that house with the gingerbread, the stained glass, and the cupola.

The lady of the house answers. You recognize her—your own grandmother, Mrs. Middleclass. She is almost as plump as you remember her, for she "put on some good healthy flesh" after she married.

She welcomes you and offers coffee cake, fresh from her modern kitchen (running water from

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a hand pump; the best coal range Pittsburgh ever produced). Everything about her house is modern — hand-painted china, souvenirs from the Columbian Exposition, beaded portieres, shining baseburner stoves, gas lights, a telephone on the wall.

There is no bathroom, but she and Mr. Middleclass are thinking of putting one in. Mr. Middleclass's mother calls this nonsense, but your grandmother keeps up with the times. She is an advocate of clothing reform, wears only one petticoat, bathes twice a week, and her corsets are guaranteed rustproof. She has been known to defend female suffrage—though not in the presence of Mr. Middleclass.

Nevertheless, you find difficulty in talking with her. Let's jump back to the present and try again.

The automatic elevator takes us to the ninth floor, and we pick out a door by its number, that being the only way to distinguish it.

"Don't bother to ring," you say? What? It's *your* door and you know exactly what lies beyond it—

Very well, let's move a half century into the future and try another middleclass home.

It's a suburban home not two hundred miles from the city. You pick out your destination from the air while the cab is landing you—a cluster of hemispheres which makes you think of the houses Dorothy found in *Oz*.

You set the cab to return to its hangar, and you go into the entrance hall. You neither knock nor ring. The screen has warned them before you touched down on the landing flat and the autobutler's transparency is shining with: PLEASE RECORD A MESSAGE.

Before you can address the microphone, a voice calls out, "Oh, it's you! Come in, come in." There is a short wait, because your granddaughter is not at the door. The autobutler has flashed your face to the patio, where she was reading and sunning herself, and has relayed her voice back to you.

She pauses at the door, looks at you through one-way glass, and frowns slightly; she knows your old-fashioned disapproval of casual nakedness. Her kindness causes her to disobey the family psychiatrist—she grabs a robe and covers herself before signaling the door to open.

You have thus been classed with strangers, tradespeople, and others who are not family intimates. But you must swallow your annoyance; you cannot object to her wearing clothes when you have disapproved of her not doing so.

There is no reason why she

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should wear clothes at home. The house is clean — not somewhat clean, but *clean*—and comfortable. The floor is warm to bare feet; there are no unpleasant drafts, no cold walls. All dust is precipitated from air entering this house. All textures, of floor, of couch, of chair, are comfortable to bare skin. Sterilizing, ultra-violet light floods each room whenever it is unoccupied, and, several times a day, a "whirlwind" blows house-created dust from all surfaces and whisks it out. These auto-services are unobtrusive because automatic cutoff switches prevent them from occurring whenever a mass in a room is radiating at blood temperature.

Such a house can become untidy, but not dirty. Five minutes of straightening, a few swipes at children's fingermarks and her day's housekeeping is done. Oftener than sheets were changed in Mr. McKinley's day, this housewife rolls out a fresh layer of sheeting on each sitting surface and stuffs the discard down the oubliette. This is easy; there is a year's supply on a roll concealed in each chair or couch. The tissue sticks by pressure until pulled loose and does not obscure the pattern and color.

You go into the family room, sit down, and remark on the lovely day.

"Isn't it?" she answers. "Come sunbathe with me."

The sunny patio gives excuse for bare skin by anyone's standards. Thankfully, she throws off the robe and stretches out on a couch. You hesitate a moment. After all, though, she is your own grandchild, so why not? You undress quickly, since you left your outer wrap and shoes at the door (only barbarians wear street shoes in a house) and what remains is easily discarded. Your grandparents had to get used to a mid-century beach. It was no easier than this.

On the other hand, their bodies were wrinkled and old, whereas yours isn't. The triumphs of endocrinology, of cosmetics, of plastic surgery, of figure control in every way are such that a man or a woman need not change markedly from maturity until old age. A person can keep his body as firm and slender as he wishes —and most of them so wish. This has produced a paradox; the United States has the highest percentage of old people in all its two and a quarter centuries, yet it seems to have a larger proportion of handsome young citizens than ever before.

("Don't whistle, son! That's your grandmother—")

This garden is half sunbathing patio, complete with shrubs and flowers, lawn and couches, and

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half swimming pool. The day, though sunny, is quite cold—but not in the garden, nor is the pool chilly. The garden appears to be outdoors, but is not; it is covered by a bubble of transparent plastic, blown and cured on the spot. You are inside the bubble; the Sun is outside; you cannot see the plastic.

She invites you to lunch; you protest.

"Nonsense!" she answers. "I like to cook."

Into the house she goes. You think of following, but it is deliciously warm in the March sunshine and you are feeling relaxed to be away from the city. You locate a switch on the side of the couch, set it for gentle massage, and let it knead your troubles away. The couch notes your heart rate and breathing; as they slow, so does it. When you fall asleep, it stops.

Meanwhile your hostess has been "slaving away over a hot stove." To be precise, she has allowed a menu selector to pick out an 800-calory, 4-ration-point luncheon. It is a random-choice gadget, somewhat like a slot machine, which has in it the running inventory of her larder and which will keep hunting until it turns up a balanced meal. Some housewives claim that it takes the art out of cookery, but our hostess is one of many who have accepted it thankfully as an endless source of new menus. The choice is limited today as it has been three months since she had done grocery shopping. She rejects several menus; the selector continues patiently to turn up combinations until she finally accepts one based around fish disguised as chops.

Your hostess takes the selected items from shelves or the freezer. All are prepared; some are precooked. Those still to be cooked she puts into her—well, her "processing equipment," though she calls it a "stove." Part of it traces its ancestry to diathermy equipment and other features derived from metal enameling processes. She sets up cycles, punches buttons, and must wait two or three minutes for the meal.

Despite her complicated kitchen, she doesn't eat as well as her great grandmother did—too many people and too few acres.

Never mind; the tray she carries out to the patio is well laden and beautiful. You are both willing to nap again when it is empty. You wake to find that she has burned the dishes and is recovering from her "exertions" in her refresher. Feeling hot and sweaty from your nap, you decide to use it when she come out. There is a wide choice offered by the 'fresher, but you limit yourself to a warm shower growing gradually cooler, fol-

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lowed by warm air drying, a short massage, spraying with scent, and dusting with powder.

Your host arrives home as you come out; he has taken a holiday from his engineering job and has had the two boys down at the beach.

His wife sends the boys in to 'fresh themselves, then says, "Have a nice day, dear?"

He answers, "The traffic was terrible. Had to make the last hundred miles on automatic. Anything on the phone for me?"

"Weren't you on relay?"

"Didn't set it. Didn't want to be bothered." He steps to the house phone, plays back his calls, finds nothing he cares to bother with—but the machine goes ahead and prints one massage. He pulls it out and tears it off.

"What is it?" his wife asks.

"Telestat from Luna City—from Aunt Jane."

"What does she say?"

"Nothing much. According to her, the Moon is a great place and she wants us to come visit her."

"Not likely!" his wife answers. "Imagine being shut up in an air-conditioned cave."

"When you are Aunt Jane's age, my honey lamb, and as frail as she is, with a bad heart thrown in, you'll go to the Moon and like it Low gravity is not to be sneezed at. Auntie will probably live to be a hundred and twenty, heart trouble and all."

"Would *you* go to the Moon?" she asks.

"If I needed to and could afford it. Right?" he asks you.

You consider your answer. Life still looks good to you and stairways are beginning to be difficult. Low gravity is attractive, even though it means living out your days at the Geriatrics Foundation on the Moon.

"It might be fun to visit," you answer. "One wouldn't have to stay."

HOSPITALS for old people on the Moon? Let's not be silly—

Or is it silly? Might it not be a logical and necessary outcome of our world today?

Space travel we will have not fifty years from now, but much sooner. It's breathing down our necks. As for geriatrics on the Moon, for most of us no price is too high and no amount of trouble is too great to extend the years of our lives. It is possible that low gravity (one-sixth, on the Moon) may not lengthen lives; nevertheless it may—we don't know yet—and it will most certainly add greatly to comfort on reaching that inevitable age when the burden of dragging around one's body is almost too much, or when we would otherwise resort to an oxygen tent to

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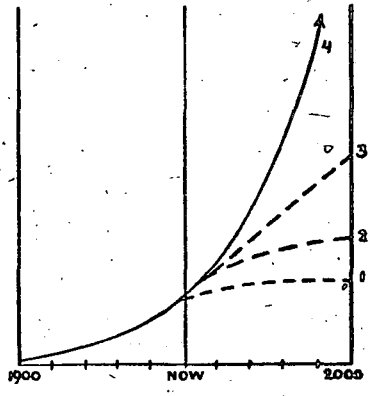
lessen the work of a wornout heart.

By the rules of prophecy, such a prediction is *probable,* rather than impossible.

But the items and gadgets suggested above are examples of *timid* prophecy.

What are the rules of prophecy, if any?



Look at the graph shown here. The solid curve is what has been going on this past century. It represents many things—use of power, speed of transport, numbers of scientific and technical workers, advance in communication, average miles traveled per person per year, advances in mathematics, the rising curve of knowledge. Call it the curve of human achievement.

What is the correct way to project this curve into the future? Despite everything, there is a stubborn "common sense" tendency to project it along dotted line number (1) like the patent office official of a hundred years back who quit his job "because everything had already been invented." Even those who don't expect a slowing up at once tend to expect us to reach a point of diminishing returns—dotted line number (2).

Very daring minds are willing to predict that we will continue our present rate of progress—dotted line number (3) — a tangent.

But the proper way to project the curve is dotted line number (4), because there is no reason, mathematical, scientific, or historical, to expect that curve to flatten out, or to reach a point of diminishing returns, or simply to go on as a tangent. The correct projection, by all known facts today, is for the curve to go on up indefinitely with *increasing* steepness.

The timid little predictions earlier in this article actually belong to curve (1) or, at most, to curve (2). You can count on changes in the next fifty years at least *eight times* as great as the changes of the past fifty years.

The Age of Science *has not yet opened.*

AXIOM: A "nine-day wonder"

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of disease is revising relations between sexes to an extent that will change our entire social and economic structure.

3. The most important military fact of this century is that there is no way to repel an attack from space.

4. It appears utterly impossible that the United States will start a "preventive war." We will fight when attacked, either directly or in a territory we have guaranteed to defend.

5. In fifteen years the housing shortage will be solved by a "breakthrough" into new technology which will make every house now standing as obsolete as outdoor privies. The housing is taken as a matter of course on the tenth day.

AXIOM: A "common sense" prediction is sure to err on the side of timidity.

AXIOM: The more extravagant a prediction sounds, the more likely it is to come true.

So let's have a few free-swinging predictions about the future. Some will be wrong—but cautious predictions are *sure* to be wrong.

1. Interplanetary travel is waiting at your front door, C.O.D. It's yours when you pay for it, which the government is doing at least on an experimental basis.

2. Contraception and control shortage will get worse until then.

6. We'll all be getting a little hungry by and by.

7. The cult of the phony in art will disappear. So-called "modern art" will be discussed only by psychiatrists.

8. Freud will be classed as a pre-scientific, intuitive pioneer, and psychoanalysis will be replaced as a growing, changing "operational psychology" based on measurement and prediction.

9. Cancer, the common cold, and tooth decay will all be conquered. The revolutionary new problem in medical research will be to accomplish "regeneration," i.e., to enable a man to grow a new leg, rather than fit him with an artificial limb.

10. By the end of this century mankind will have explored the Solar System, and the first ship intended to reach the nearest star will be abuilding.

11. Your personal telephone will be small enough to carry in your handbag. Your house telephone will record messages, answer simple queries, and transmit vision.

12. Intelligent life of some sort will be found on Mars.

13. A thousand miles an hour at a cent a mile will be commonplace; short hauls will be made in evacuated subways at extreme speeds.

14. A major objective of ap-

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plied physics will be to control gravity.

15 We will not achieve a "world state" in the predictable future. Nevertheless, Communism will vanish from this planet.

16. Increasing mobility will disenfranchise a majority of the population. About 1990 a constitutional amendment will do away with state lines while retaining the semblance.

17. All aircraft will be controlled by a giant radar net run on a continentwide basis by a multiple electronic "brain."

18. Fish and yeast will become our principle sources of proteins. Beef will be a luxury; lamb and mutton will disappear, because sheep destroy grazing land.

19. Mankind will *not* destroy itself, nor will "civilization" be wiped out.

Here are things we *won't* get soon, if ever:

Travel through time.

Travel faster than the speed of light.

Control of telepathy and other E.S.P. phenomena.

"Radio" transmission of matter.

Manlike robots with manlike reactions.

Laboratory creation of life.

Real understanding of what "thought" is and how it is related to matter.

Scientific proof of personal survival after death.

A permanent end to war. (I don't like that prediction any better than you do.)

PREDICTION of gadgets is a parlor trick anyone can learn; but only a fool would attempt to predict details of future history (except as fiction, so labeled). There are too many unknowns and no techniques for integrating them even if they were known.

Even to make predictions about overall trends in technology is now most difficult. In fields where, before World War II, there was one man working in public, there are now ten, or a hundred, working in secret. There may be six men in the country who have a clear picture of what is going on in science today. *There may not be even one.*

This is in itself a trend. Many leading scientists consider it a factor as disabling to us as the dogma of Lysenkoism is to Russian technology. Nevertheless there are clear-cut trends which are certain to make this coming era enormously more productive and interesting than the frantic one we have just passed through. Among them are:

Cybernetics: The study of communication and control of mechanisms and organisms. This includes the wonderful field of mechanical and electronic

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"brains"—but is not limited to it. (These "brains" are a factor in themselves that will speed up technical progress the way a war does.)

Semantics: A field which seems concerned only with definitions of words. It is not; it is a frontal attack on epistemology—that is to say, *how* we know *what* we know, a subject formerly belonging to long-haired philosophers.

New tools of mathematics and logic, such as calculus of statement, Boolean logic, morphological analysis, generalized symbology, newly invented mathematics of every sort—there is not space even to name these enormous fields, but they offer impetus to every other field—medicine, social relations, biology, economics, anything.

Biochemistry: Research into the nature of protoplasm, into enzyme chemistry, viruses, etc., give hope not only that we may conquer disease, but that we may someday understand the mechanisms of life itself. Through this, and with the aid of cybernetic machines and radioactive isotopes, we may eventually acquire a rigor of chemistry. Chemistry is not a discipline today; it is a jungle. We know the chemical behavior depends on the number of orbital electrons in an atom and that physical and chemical properties follow the pattern called the Periodic Table. We don't know much else, save by cut-and-try, despite the great size and importance of the chemical industry. When chemistry becomes a discipline, mathematical chemists will design new materials, predict their properties, and tell engineers how to make them—without ever entering a laboratory. We've got a *long* way to go on that one!

Nucleonics: We have yet to find out what makes the atom tick. Atomic power? Yes, we'll have it, in convenient packages—when we understand the nucleus. The field of radio-isotopes alone is larger than was the entire known body of science in 1900. Before we are through with these problems, we may find out how the Universe is shaped and *why*. Not to mention enormous unknown vistas best represented by ? ? ?

Some physicists are now using two time scales, the T-scale, and the *tau*-scale. Three billion years on one scale can equal a mere split-second on the other scale—and yet both apply to you and your kitchen stove. Of such anarchy is our present state in physics.

For such reasons we must insist that the *Age of Science has not yet opened.*

The greatest crisis facing us is not Russia, not the Atom bomb, not corruption in government, not

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encroaching hunger, nor the morals of the young. It is a crisis in the *organization* and *accessibility* of human knowledge. We own an enormous "encyclopedia" which isn't even arranged alphabetically. Our "file cards" are spilled on the floor, nor were they ever in order. The answers we want may be buried somewhere in the heap, but it might take a lifetime to locate two already known facts, place them side by side and derive a third fact, the one we urgently need.

Call it the Crisis of the Librarian.

We need a new "specialist" who is not a specialist but a synthesist. We need a new science to be the secretary to all other sciences.

Fortune-tellers can always be sure of repeat customers by predicting what the customer wants to hear . . . it matters not whether the prediction comes true. Contrariwise, the weather man is often blamed for bad weather.

Brace yourself.

In 1900 the cloud on the horizon was no bigger than a man's hand—but what lay ahead was the Panic of 1907, World War I, the panic following it, the Depression, Fascism, World War II, the Atom Bomb, and Red Russia.

The period immediately ahead will be the roughest, cruelest one in the long, hard history of mankind. It will probably include the worst World War of them all. Even if we are spared that awful possibility, it is certain that there will be no security anywhere, save what you dig out of your own inner spirit.

BUT what of that picture we drew of domestic luxury and tranquility for Mr. and Mrs. Middleclass, style 2000 A. D.?

They lived through it. They survived.

Our prospects need not dismay you, not if you or your kin were at Bloody Nose Ridge, at Gettysburg—trudged across the Plains or went through the wars anywhere in the world. You and I are here because we carry the genes of uncountable ancestors who fought—and won—against death in all its forms. We're tough. We'll survive. *Most of us.*

We've lasted through the preliminary bouts; the main event is coming up.

But it's not for sissies.

The gathering wind will not destroy everything, nor will the Age of Science change everything. Long after the first star ship leaves for parts unknown, there will still be outhouses in upstate New York, there will be steers in Texas, and, no doubt, the English will stop for tea.

Stick around.

—ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

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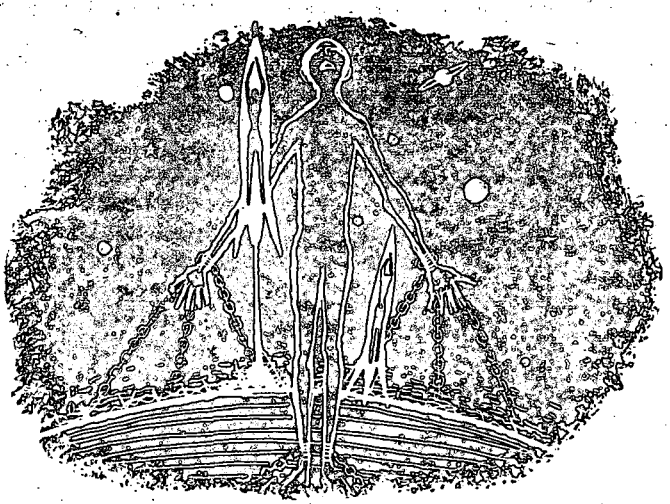

DOUBLE STANDARD

By ALFRED COPPEL

He did not have the qualifications to go into space—so he had them manufactured!

Illustrated by MAC LELLAN

IT WAS after oh-one-hundred when Kane arrived at my apartment. I checked the hall screen carefully before letting him in, too, though the hour almost precluded the possibility of any inquisitive passers-by.

He didn't say anything at all when he saw me, but his eyes went a bit wide. That was perfectly natural, after all. The illegal plasti-cosmetician had done

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his work better than well. I wasn't the same person I had been.

I led Kane into the living room and stood before him, letting him have a good look at me.

"Well," I asked, "will it work?"

Kane lit a cigarette thoughtfully, not taking his eyes off me.

"Maybe," he said. "Just maybe."

I thought about the spaceship standing proud and tall under the stars, ready to go. And I knew that it had to work. It *had* to.

Some men dream of money, others of power. All my life I had dreamed only of lands in the sky. The red sand hills of Mars, moldering in aged slumber under a cobalt-colored day; the icy moranes of Io and Callisto, where the yellow methane snow drifted in the faint light of the Sun; the barren, stark seas of the Moon, where razor-backed mountains limned themselves against the star fields—

"I don't know, Kim; you're asking a hell of a lot, you know," Kane said.

"It'll work," I assured him. "The examination is cursory after the application has been acted on." I grinned easily under the flesh mask. "And mine has."

"You mean Kim Hall's application has," he said.

I shrugged. "Well?"

Kane frowned at me and blew smoke into the still air of the room. "The Kim Hall on the application and you aren't exactly the same person. I don't have to tell you that."

"Look," I said. "I called you here tonight to check me over and because we've been friends for a good long time. This is important to me, Kane. It isn't just that I *want* to go. I *have* to. You can understand that, maybe."

"Yes, Kim," he said bitterly. "I can understand. Maybe if I had your build and mass, I'd be trying the same thing right now. My only chance was the Eugenics Board and they turned me down cold. Remember? Sex-linked predilection to carcinoma. Unsuitable for colonial breeding stock—"

I felt a wave of pity for Kane then. I was almost sorry I'd called him over. Within six hours I would be on board the spaceship, while he would be here. Earthbound for always. Unsuitable for breeding stock in the controlled colonies of Mars or Io and Callisto.

I thought about that, too. I knew I wouldn't be able to carry off my masquerade forever. I wouldn't want to. The stringent physical examination given on landing would pierce my disguise easily. But by that time it would be too late. I'd *be* there, out among the stars. And no Earthbound spaceship captain would

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carry my mass back instead of precious cargo. I'd stay. If they wanted me for a breeder then—okay. In spite of my slight build and lack of physical strength, I'd still be where I wanted to be. In the fey lands in the sky . . .

"I wish you all the luck in the world, Kim," my friend said. "I really do. I don't mean to throw cold water on your scheme. You know how few of us are permitted off-world. Every one who makes it is a—" he grinned ruefully—"a blow struck for equality." He savored the irony of it for a moment and then his face grew serious again. "It's just that the more I think of what you've done, the more convinced I am that you can't get away with it. Forged applications. Fake fingerprints and X-rays. And *this*—" He made a gesture that took in all of my appearance. Flesh, hair, clothes. Everything.

"What the hell," I said. "It's good, isn't it?"

"Very good. In fact, you make me uncomfortable, it's so good. But it's too damned insane."

"Insane enough to work," I said. "And it's the only chance. How do you think I'd stack up with the Eugenics Board? Not a chance. What they want out there is big muscle boys. Tough breeders. This is the only way for me."

"Well," Kane said. "You're big enough now, it seems to me."

"Had to be. Lots to cover up. Lots to add."

"And you're all set? Packed and ready?"

"Yes," I said. "All set."

"Then I guess this is it." He extended his hand. I took it. "Good luck, Kim. Always," he said huskily. "I'll hear if you make it. All of us will. And we'll be cheering and thinking that maybe, before we're all too old, we can make it, too. And if not, that maybe our sons will—without having to be prize bulls, either."

He turned in the doorway and forced a grin.

"Don't forget to write," he said.

THE spacefield was streaked with the glare of floodlights, and the ship gleamed like a silvery spire against the desert night.

I joined the line of passengers at the checking desk, my half-kilo of baggage clutched nervously against my side. My heart was pounding with a mixture of fear and anticipation, my muscles twitching under the unaccustomed tension of the plastiflesh sheath that hid me.

All around me were the smells and sounds and sights of a spaceport, and above me were the stars, brilliant and close at hand in the dark sky.

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The queue moved swiftly toward the checking desk, where a gray-haired officer with a seamed face sat.

The voice of the timekeeper came periodically from the loudspeakers around the perimeter of the field.

"*Passengers for the Martian Queen, check in at desk five. It is now H minus forty-seven.*"

I stood now before the officer, tense and afraid. This was critical, the last check-point before I could actually set foot in the ship.

"*It is now H minus forty-five,*" the timer's metallic voice said.

The officer looked up at me, and then at the faked photoprint on my papers.

"Kim Hall, age twenty-nine, vocation agri-technician and hydroponics expert, height 171 centimeters, weight 60 kilos. Right?"

I nodded soundlessly.

"Sums check within mass-limits. Physical condition index 3.69. Fertility index 3.66. Compatibility index 2.99." The officer turned to a trim-looking assistant. "All check?"

The uniformed girl nodded.

I began to breathe again.

"Next desk, please," the officer said shortly.

I moved on to the medics at the next stop. A gray-clad nurse checked my pulse and respiration. She smiled at me.

"Excited?" she asked. "Don't be." She indicated the section of the checking station where the breeders were being processed. "You should see how the bulls take it," she said with a laugh.

She picked up an electrified stamp. "Now don't worry. This won't hurt and it won't disfigure you permanently. But the ship's guards won't let you aboard without it. Government regulations, you know. We cannot load personal dossiers on the ships and this will tell the officers all they need to know about you. Weight limitations, you see."

I almost laughed in her face at that. If there was one thing all Earth could offer me that I wanted, it was that stamp on my forehead: a passport to the stars . . .

She set the stamp and pressed it against my forehead. I had a momentary fear about the durability of the flesh mask that covered my face, but it was unnecessary. The plastiskin took the temporary tattoo the way real flesh would have.

I felt the skin and read it in my mind. I knew exactly what it said. I'd dreamed of it so often and so long all my life. My ticket on the *Martian Queen*. My pass to those lands in the sky.

CERT SXF HALL, K. RS MART QUEEN SN1775690.

I walked across the ramp and

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into the lift beside the great tapering hull of the rocket. My heart was singing.

The timer said: *"It is H minus thirty-one."*

And then I stepped through the outer valve, into the *Queen*. The air was brisk with the tang of hydrogenol. Space-fuel. The ship was alive and humming with a thousand relays and timers and whispering generators, readying herself for space.

I LAY down in the acceleration hammock and listened to the ship.

This was everything I had wished for all my life. To be a free man among the stars. It was worth the chances I had taken, worth the lying and cheating and danger.

The conquest of space had split humanity in a manner that no one could have foreseen, though the reasons for the schism were obvious. They hinged on two factors—mass and durability. Thus it was that some remained forever Earthbound while others reached for the sky. And bureaucracy being what it was, the decision as to who stayed and who went was made along the easy, obvious line of demarcation.

I and half the human race were on the wrong side of the line.

From the ship's speakers came the voice of the timer.

"It is H minus ten. Ready yourselves for the takeoff."

I thought of Kane and the men I had known and worked with for half of my twenty-nine years. They, too, were forbidden the sky. Tragic men, really, with their need and their dream written in the lines of pain and yearning on their faces.

The speaker suddenly snapped:

"There is an illegal passenger on board! All persons will remain in their quarters until he is apprehended! Repeat: there is an illegal passenger on board! Remain in your quarters!"

My heart seemed to stop beating. Somehow, my deception had been uncovered. How, it didn't matter, but it had. And the important thing now was simply to stay on board at all costs. A space ship departure could not be delayed. The orbit was computed. The blastaway timed to the millisecond . . .

I leaped to the deck and out of my cubicle. A spidery catwalk led upward, toward the nose of the ship. Below me I could hear the first sounds of the search.

I ran up the walk, my footsteps sounding hollowly in the steel shaft. A bulkhead blocked my progress ahead and I sought the next deck.

The timer said: *"It is H minus six."*

It was a passenger deck. I

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could see frightened faces peering out of cubicles as I ran past. Behind me, the pursuit grew louder, nearer.

I slammed open a bulkhead and found another walk leading upward toward the astrogation blisters in the topmost point of the *Queen*.

Behind me, I caught a glimpse of a ship's officer running, armed with a stun-pistol. My breath rasped in my throat and the plastiskin sheath on my body shifted sickeningly.

"*You there! Halt!*" The voice was high-pitched and excited. I flung through another bulkhead hatch and out into the dorsal blister. I seemed to be suspended between Earth and sky. The stars glittered through the steelglas of the blister, and the desert lay below, streaked with searchlights and covered with tiny milling figures. The warning light on the control bunker turned from amber to red as I watched, chest heaving.

"*It is H minus three,*" the timer said. "*Rig ship for space.*"

I slammed the hatch shut and spun the wheel lock. I stood filled with a mixture of triumph and fear. They could never get me out of the ship in time now—but I would have to face blast away in the blister, unprotected. A shock that could kill . . .

Through the speaker, the captain's talker snapped orders: "*Abandon pursuit! Too late to dump him now. Pick him up after acceleration is completed.*" And then maliciously, knowing that I could hear: "*Scrape him off the deck when we're in space. That kind can't take much.*"

I felt a blaze of red fury. *That* kind. The Earthbound kind! I wanted to live, then, more than I had ever wanted to live before. To make a liar out of that sneering, superior voice. To prove that I was as good as all of them.

"*It is H minus one,*" said the timer.

Orders filtered through the speaker.

"*Outer valves closed. Inner valves closed.*"

"*Minus thirty seconds. Condition red.*"

"*Pressure in the ship. One-third atmosphere.*"

"*Twenty seconds.*"

"*Ship secure for space.*"

"*Ten, nine, eight—*"

I lay prone on the steel deck, braced myself and prayed.

"*Seven, six, five—*"

"*Gyros on. Course set.*"

"*Four, three, two—*"

The ship trembled. A great light flared beyond the curving transparency of the blister.

"*Up ship!*"

A hand smashed down on me, crushing me into the deck.

I thought: *I must live. I can't*

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die. I won't die!

I felt the spaceship rising. I felt her reaching for the stars. I was a part of her. I screamed with pain and exaltation. The hand pressed harder, choking the breath from me, stripping the plastiskin away in long, damp strips.

Darkness flickered before my eyes. I lay helpless and afraid and transfigured with a joy I had never known before.

Distorted, half-naked, I clung to life.

WHEN I opened my eyes, they were all around me. They stood in a half-circle, trim, uniformed. Their smooth faces and cropped hair and softly molded bodies looked strange against the functional steel angularity of the astrogation blister.

I staggered to my feet, long strips of plastic flesh dangling from me.

The *Queen* was in space. I was in space, no longer Earthbound.

"Yes," I said, "I lived! Look at me!"

I stripped off the flesh mask, peeled away the red, full lips, the long transformation.

"I've done it. Others will do it, too. Not breeders—not brainless ornaments to a hyper-nymphoid phallus! Just ordinary men. Ordinary men with a dream. You can't keep the sky for yourselves. It belongs to all of us."

I stood with my back to the blazing stars and laughed at them.

"In the beginning it was right that you should be given priority over us. For centuries we kept you in subjection and when the Age of Space came, you found your place. Your stamina, your small stature, everything about you fitted you to be mistresses of the sky . . .

"But it's over. Over and done with. We can all be free—"

I peeled away the artificial breasts that dangled from my chest.

I stood swaying drunkenly, defiantly.

They came to me, then. They took me gently and carried me below, to the comfort of a white bunk. They soothed my hurts and nursed me. For in spite of it all, they were women and I was a man in pain.

—ALFRED COPPEL

The Big News Next Month . . .

THE YEAR OF THE JACKPOT
by Robert A. Heinlein

A remorselessly logical novelet based on *actual, provable statistics!* It's fiction, of course, but you may find that fact hard to remember!

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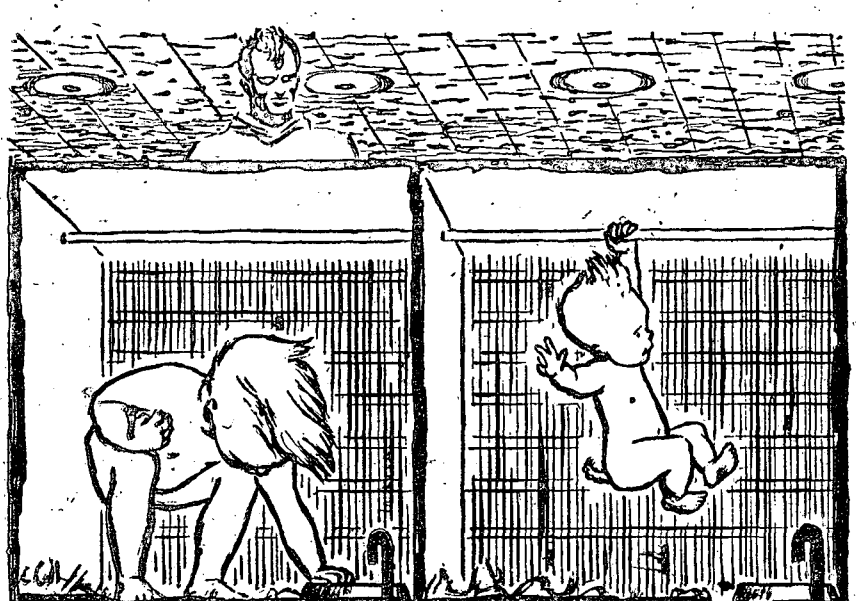
Conditionally

They were such cute synthetic creatures, it was impossible not to love them. Of course, that was precisely why they were dangerous!

THERE was no use hanging around after breakfast. His wife was in a hurt mood, and he could neither endure the hurt nor remove it. He put on his coat in the kitchen and stood for a moment with his hat in his hands. His wife was still at the table, absently fingering the handle of her cup and staring fixedly out the window at the kennels behind the house. He moved



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Human

By WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

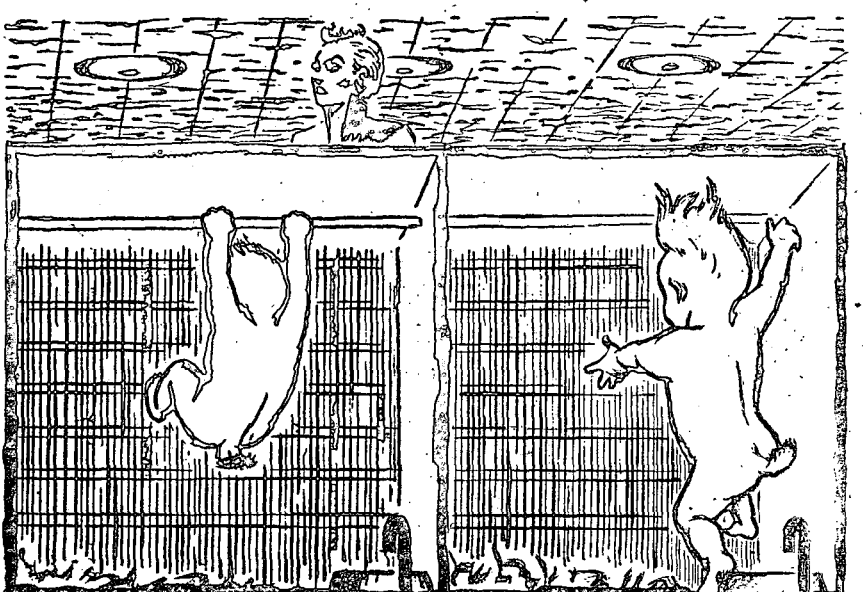
Illustrated by DAVID STONE

quietly up behind her and touched her silk-clad shoulder. The shoulder shivered away from him, and her dark hair swung shiningly as she shuddered. He drew his hand back and his bewildered face went slack and miserable.

"Honeymoon's over, huh?"

She said nothing, but shrugged faintly.

"You knew I worked for the F.B.A.," he said. "You knew I'd have charge of a district pound. You knew it before we got married."



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"I didn't know you killed them," she said venomously

"I won't have to kill many. Besides, they're only animals."

"*Intelligent* animals!"

"Intelligent as a human imbecile, maybe."

"A small child is an imbecile. Would you kill a small child?"

"You're taking intelligence as the only criterion of humanity," he protested hopelessly, knowing that a logical defense was useless against sentimentality. "Baby—"

"Don't call me baby! Call *them* baby!"

Norris backed a few steps toward the door. Against his better judgment, he spoke again. "Anne honey, look! Think of the *good* things about the job. Sure, everything has its ugly angles. But think—we get this house rent-free; I've got my own district with no bosses around; I make my own hours; you'll meet lots of people that stop in at the pound. It's a *fine* job, honey!"

She sipped her coffee and appeared to be listening, so he went on.

"And what can I do? You know how the Federation handles employment. They looked over my aptitude tests and sent me to Bio-Administration. If I don't want to follow my aptitudes, the only choice is common labor. That's the *law*."

"I suppose you have an aptitude for killing babies?" she said sweetly.

Norris withered. His voice went desperate. "They assigned me to it because I *liked* babies. And because I have a B.S. in biology and an aptitude for dealing with people. Can't you understand? Destroying unclaimed units is the smallest part of it. Honey, before the evolvotron, before Anthropos went into the mutant-animal business, people used to elect dog-catchers. Think of it that way—I'm just a dogcatcher."

Her cool green eyes turned slowly to meet his gaze. Her face was delicately cut from cold marble. She was a small woman, slender and fragile, but her quiet contempt made her loom.

He backed closer to the door.

"Well, I've got to get on the job." He put on his hat and picked at a splinter on the door. He frowned studiously at the splinter. "I—I'll see you tonight." He ripped the splinter loose when it became obvious that she didn't want to be kissed.

He grunted a nervous good-by and stumbled down the hall and out of the house. The honeymoon was over, all right.

He climbed in the kennel-truck and drove east toward the highway. The suburban street wound among the pastel plasticoid cottages that were set approximately two to an acre on the lightly

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wooded land. With its population legally fixed at three hundred million, most of the country had become one big suburb, dotted with community centers and lined with narrow belts of industrial development. Norris wished there were someplace where he could be completely alone.

As he approached an intersection, he saw a small animal sitting on the curb, wrapped in its own bushy tail. Its oversized head was bald on top, but the rest of its body was covered with blue-gray fur. Its tiny pink tongue was licking daintily at small forepaws with prehensile thumbs. It was a cat-Q-5. It glanced curiously at the truck as Norris pulled to a halt.

He smiled at it from the window and called, "What's your name, kitten?"

The cat-Q-5 stared at him impassively for a moment, let out a stuttering high-pitched wail, then: "Kiyi Rorry."

"Whose child are you, Rorry?" he asked. "Where do you live?"

The cat-Q-5 took its time about answering. There were no houses near the intersection, and Norris feared that the animal might be lost. It blinked at him, sleepily bored, and resumed its paw-washing. He repeated the questions.

"Mama kiyi," said the cat-Q-5 disgustedly.

"That's right, Mama's kitty. But where is Mama? Do you suppose she ran away?"

The cat-Q-5 looked startled. It stuttered for a moment, and its fur crept slowly erect. It glanced around hurriedly, then shot off down the street at a fast scamper. He followed it in the truck until it darted onto a porch and began wailing through the screen, "Mama no run ray! Mama no run ray!"

Norris grinned and drove on. A class-C couple, allowed no children of their own, could get quite attached to a cat-Q-5. The felines were emotionally safer than the quasi-human chimp-K series called "neutroids." When a pet neutroid died, a family was broken with grief; but most couples could endure the death of a cat-Q or a dog-F. Class-C couples were allowed two lesser units or one neutroid.

His grin faded as he wondered which Anne would choose. The Norrises were class-C—defective heredity.

HE found himself in Sherman III Community Center—eight blocks of commercial buildings, serving the surrounding suburbs. He stopped at the message office to pick up his mail. There was a memo from Chief Franklin. He tore it open nervously and read it in the truck. It was some-

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thing he had been expecting for several days.

Attention All District Inspectors:
Subject: Deviant Neutroid.

You will immediately begin a systematic and thorough survey of all animals whose serial numbers fall in the Bermuda-K-99 series for birth dates during July 2234. This is in connection with the Delmont Negligency Case. Seize all animals in this category, impound, and run proper sections of normalcy tests. Watch for mental and glandular deviation. Delmont has confessed to passing only one non-standard unit, but there may be others. He disclaims memory of deviant's serial number. This could be a ruse to bring a stop to investigations when one animal is found. Be thorough.

If allowed to reach age-set or adulthood, such a deviant could be dangerous to its owner or to others. Hold all seized K-99s who show the slightest abnormality in the normalcy tests. Forward to central lab. Return standard units to their owners. Accomplish entire survey project within seven days.

C. Franklin

Norris frowned at the last sentence. His district covered about two hundred square miles. Its replacement-quota of new neutroids was around three hundred animals a month. He tried to estimate how many of July's influx had been K-99s from Bermuda Factory. Forty, at least. Could he do it in a week? And there were only eleven empty neutroid cages in his kennel. The other forty-nine were occupied by the previous inspector's "unclaimed" inventory—awaiting destruction.

He wadded the memo in his pocket, then nosed the truck onto the highway and headed toward Wylo City and the district wholesale offices of Anthropos, Inc. They should be able to give him a list of all July's Bermuda K-99 serial numbers that had entered his territory, together with the retailers to whom the animals had been sold. A week's deadline for finding and testing forty neutroids would put him in a tight squeeze.

He was halfway to Wylo City when the radiophone buzzed on his dashboard. He pulled into the slow lane and answered quickly, hoping for Anne's voice. A polite professional purr came instead.

"Inspector Norris? This is Doctor Georges. We haven't met, but I imagine we will. Are you extremely busy at the moment?"

Norris hesitated. "Extremely," he said.

"Well, this won't take long. One of my patients—a Mrs. Sarah Glubbes—called a while ago and said her baby was sick. I must be getting absent-minded, because I forgot she was class C until I got there." He hesitated. "The baby turned out to be a neutroid. It's dying. Eighteenth order virus."

"So?"

"Well, she's—uh—rather a *peculiar* woman, Inspector. Keeps telling me how much trouble she

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had in childbirth, and how she can't ever have another one. It's pathetic. She *believes* it's her own. Do you understand?"

"I think so," Norris replied slowly. "But what do you want me to do? Can't you send the neutroid to a vet?"

"She insists it's going to a hospital. Worst part is that she's heard of the disease. Knows it can be cured with the proper treatment—in humans. Of course, no hospital would play along with her fantasy and take a neutroid, especially since she couldn't pay for its treatment."

"I still don't see—"

"I thought perhaps you could help me fake a substitution. It's a K-48 series, five-year-old, three-year set. Do you have one in the pound that's not claimed?"

Norris thought for a moment. "I think I have *one*. You're welcome to it, Doctor, but you can't fake a serial number. She'll know it. And even though they look exactly alike, the new one won't recognize her. It'll be spooky."

There was a long pause, followed by a sigh. "I'll try it anyway. Can I come get the animal now?"

"I'm on the highway—"

"Please, Norris! This is urgent. That woman will lose her mind completely if—"

"All right, I'll call my wife and tell her to open the pound for you. Pick out the K-48 and sign for it. And listen—"

"Yes?"

"Don't let me catch you falsifying a serial number."

Doctor Georges laughed faintly. "I won't, Norris. Thanks a million." He hung up quickly.

Norris immediately regretted his consent. It bordered on being illegal. But he saw it as a quick way to get rid of an animal that might later have to be killed.

He called Anne. Her voice was dull. She seemed depressed, but not angry. When he finished talking, she said, "All right, Terry," and hung up.

BY noon, he had finished checking the shipping lists at the wholesale house in Wylo City. Only thirty-five of July's Bermuda-K-99s had entered his territory, and they were about equally divided among five pet shops, three of which were in Wylo City.

After lunch, he called each of the retail dealers, read them the serial numbers, and asked them to check the sales records for names and addresses of individual buyers. By three o'clock, he had the entire list filled out, and the task began to look easier. All that remained was to pick up the thirty-five animals.

And *that*, he thought, was like trying to take a year-old baby

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away from its doting mother. He sighed and drove to the Wylo suburbs to begin his rounds.

Anne met him at the door when he came home at six. He stood on the porch for a moment, smiling at her weakly. The smile was not returned.

"Doctor Georges came," she told him. "He signed for the—" She stopped to stare at him. "Darling, your face! What happened?"

Gingerly he touch the livid welts down the side of his cheek. "Just scratched a little," he muttered. He pushed past her and went to the phone in the hall. He sat eying it distastefully for a moment, not liking what he had to do. Anne came to stand beside him and examine the scratches.

Finally he lifted the phone and dialed the Wylo exchange. A grating mechanical voice answered, "Locator center. Your party, please."

"Sheriff Yates," Norris grunted.

The robot operator, which had on tape the working habits of each Wylo City citizen, began calling numbers. It found the off-duty sheriff on its third try, in a Wylo pool hall.

"I'm getting so I hate that infernal gadget," Yates grumbled. "I think it's got me psyched. What do you want, Norris?"

"Cooperation. I'm mailing you three letters charging three Wylo citizens with resisting a Federal official—namely *me*—and charging one of them with assault. I tried to pick up their neutroids for a pound inspection—"

Yates bellowed lusty laughter into the phone.

"It's not funny. I've got to get those neutroids. It's in connection with the Delmont case."

Yates stopped laughing. "Oh. Well, I'll take care of it."

"It's a rush-order, Sheriff. Can you get the warrants tonight and pick up the animals in the morning?"

"Easy on those warrants, boy. Judge Charleman can't be disturbed just any time. I can get the newts to you by noon, I guess, provided we don't have to get a helicopter posse to chase down the mothers."

"That'll be all right. And listen, Yates—fix it so the charges will be dropped if they cooperate. Don't shake those warrants around unless they just won't listen to reason. But get those neutroids."

"Okay, boy. Gotcha."

Norris gave him the names and addresses of the three unwilling mothers. As soon as he hung up, Anne touched his shoulders and said, "Sit still." She began smoothing a chilly ointment over his burning cheek.

"Hard day?" she asked.

"Not too hard. Those were just

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three out of fifteen. I got the other twelve. They're in the truck."

"That's good," she said. "You've got only twelve empty cages."

He neglected to tell her that he had stopped at twelve for just this reason. "Guess I better get them unloaded," he said, standing up.

"Can I help you?"

He stared at her for a moment, saying nothing. She smiled a little and looked aside. "Terry, I'm sorry—about this morning. I—I know you've got a job that has to be—" Her lip quivered slightly.

Norris grinned, caught her shoulders, and pulled her close. "Honeymoon's on again, huh?" she whispered against his neck.

"Come on," he grunted. "Let's unload some neutroids, before I forget all about work."

THEY went out to the kennels together. The cages were inside a sprawling concrete barn, which was divided into three large rooms—one for the fragile neuter humanoid creatures, and another for the lesser mutants, such as cat-Qs, dog-Fs, dwarf bears, and foot-high lambs that never matured into sheep. The third room contained a small gas chamber with a conveyor belt leading from it to a crematory-incinerator.

Norris kept the third locked lest his wife see its furnishings.

The doll-like neutroids began their mindless chatter as soon as their keepers entered the building. Dozens of blazing blond heads began dancing about their cages. Their bodies thwacked against the wire mesh as they leaped about their compartments with monkey grace.

Their human appearance was broken by only two distinct features: short beaverlike tails decorated with fluffy curls of fur, and an erect thatch of scalp-hair that grew up into a bright candleflame. Otherwise, they appeared completely human, with baby-pink skin, quick little smiles, and cherubic faces. They were sexually neuter and never grew beyond a predetermined age-set which varied for each series. Age-sets were available from one to ten years human equivalent. Once a neutroid reached its age-set, it remained at the set's child-development level until death.

"They must be getting to know you pretty well," Anne said, glancing around at the cages.

Norris was wearing a slight frown as he inspected the room. "They've never gotten this excited before."

He walked along a row of cages, then stopped by a K-76 to stare.

"*Apple cores!*" He turned to

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face his wife. "How did apples get in there?"

She reddened. "I felt sorry for them, eating that goo from the mechanical feeder. I drove down to Sherman III and bought six dozen cooking apples."

"That was a mistake."

She frowned irritably. "We can afford it."

"That's not the point. There's a reason for the mechanical feeders. He paused, wondering how he could tell her the truth. He blundered on: "They get to love whoever feeds them."

"I can't see—"

"How would you feel about disposing of something that loved you?"

Anne folded her arms and stared at him. "Planning to dispose of any soon?" she asked acidly.

"Honeymoon's off again, eh?"

She turned away. "I'm sorry, Terry. I'll try not to mention it again."

He began unloading the truck, pulling the frightened and squirming doll-things forth one at a time with a snare-pole. They were one-man pets, always frightened of strangers.

"What's the Delmont case, Terry?" Anne asked while he worked.

"Huh?"

"I heard you mention it on the phone. Anything to do with why you got your face scratched?"

He nodded sourly. "Indirectly, yes. It's a long story."

"Tell me."

"Well, Delmont was a greenhorn evolvotron operator at the Bermuda plant. His job was taking the unfertilized chimpanzee ova out of the egg-multiplier, mounting them in his machine, and bombarding the gene structure with sub-atomic particles. It's tricky business. He flashes a huge enlargement of the ovum on the electron microscope screen —large enough so he can see the individual protein molecules. He has an artificial gene pattern to compare it with. It's like shooting sub-atomic billiards. He's got to fire alpha-particles into the gene structure and displace certain links by just the right amount. And he's got to be quick about it before the ovum dies from an overdose of radiation from the enlarger. A good operator can get one success out of seven tries.

"Well, Delmont worked a week and spoiled over a hundred ova without a single success. They threatened to fire him. I guess he got hysterical. Anyway, he reported one success the next day. It was faked. The ovum had a couple of flaws — something wrong in the central nervous system's determinants, and in the glandular makeup. Not a stand-

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ard neutroid ovum. He passed it on to the incubators to get a credit, knowing it wouldn't be caught until after birth."

"It wasn't caught at all?" Anne asked.

"Funny thing, he was afraid it wouldn't be. He got to worrying about it, thought maybe a mental-deviant would pass, and that it might be dangerous. So he went back to its incubator and cut off the hormone flow into its compartment."

"Why that?"

"So it *would* develop sexuality. A neutroid would be born a female if they didn't give it suppressive doses of male hormone prenatally. That keeps ovaries from developing and it comes out neuter. But Delmont figured a female would be caught and stopped before the final inspection. They'd dispose of her without even bothering to examine for the other defects. And he could blame the sexuality on an equipment malfunction. He thought it was pretty smart. Trouble was they didn't catch the female. She went on through; they all *look* female."

"How did they find out about it now?"

"He got caught last month, trying it again. And he confessed to doing it once before. No telling how many times he *really* did it."

Norris held up the final kicking, squealing, tassel-haired doll from the back of the kennel truck. He grinned at his wife. "This little fellow, for instance. It might be a potential she. It might also be a potential murderer. *All* these kiddos are from the machines in the section where Delmont worked."

Anne snorted and caught the baby-creature in her arms. It struggled and tried to bite, but subsided a little when she disentangled it from the snare. "Kkr-r-reee," it cooed nervously. "Kkr-r-reee!"

"You tell him you're no murderer," Anne purred to it.

Norris watched disapprovingly while she fondled it. One thing he had learned: to steer clear of emotional attachments. It was eight months old and looked like a child of two years—a year short of its age-set. And it was designed to be as affectionate as a human child.

"Put it in the cage, Anne," he said quietly.

She looked up and shook her head.

"It belongs to somebody else. If it fixes a libido attachment on you, you're actually robbing its owner. They can't love many people at once."

She snorted, but installed the thing in its cage.

"Anne—" Norris hesitated, hating to approach the subject.

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"Do you— want one—for yourself? I can sign an unclaimed one over to you to keep in the house. It won't cost us anything."

Slowly she shook her head, and her pale eyes went moody and luminous. "I'm going to have one of my own," she said.

He stood in the back of the truck, staring down at her. "Do you realize what—"

"I know what I'm saying. We're class-C on account of heart-trouble in both our families. Well, I don't care, Terry. I'm not going to waste a heart over one of these pathetic little artificial animals. We're going to have a baby."

"You know what they'd do to us?"

"If they catch us, yes—compulsory divorce, sterilization. But they won't catch us. I'll have it at home, Terry. Not even a doctor. We'll hide it."

"I won't let you do such a thing."

She faced him angrily. "Oh, this whole rotten *world!*" she choked. Suddenly she turned and fled out of the building. She was sobbing.

NORRIS climbed slowly down from the truck and wandered on into the house. She was not in the kitchen nor the living room. The bedroom door was locked. He shrugged and went to sit on the sofa. The television set was on, and a newscast was coming from a local station.

". . . we were unable to get shots of the body," the announcer was saying. "But here is a view of the Georges residence. I'll switch you to our mobile unit in Sherman II, James Duncan reporting."

Norris frowned with bewilderment as the scene shifted to a two-story plasticoid house among the elm trees. It was after dark, but the mobile unit's powerful floodlights made daylight of the house and its yard and the police 'copters sitting in a side lot. An ambulance was parked in the street. A new voice came on the audio.

"This is James Duncan, ladies and gentlemen, speaking to you from our mobile unit in front of the late Doctor Hiram Georges' residence just west of Sherman II. We are waiting for the stretcher to be brought out, and Police Chief Erskine Miler is standing here beside me to give us a word about the case. Doctor Georges' death has shocked the community deeply. Most of you local listeners have known him for many years—some of you have depended upon his services as a family physician. He was a man well known, well loved. But now let's listen to Chief Miler."

Norris sat breathing quickly.

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There could scarcely be two Doctor Georges in the community, but only this morning . . .

A growling drawl came from the audio. "This's Chief Miler speaking, folks. I just want to say that if any of you know the whereabouts of a Mrs. Sarah Glubbes, call me immediately. She's wanted for questioning."

"Thank you, Chief. This is James Duncan again. I'll review the facts for you briefly again, ladies and gentlemen. At seven o'clock, less than an hour ago, a woman—allegedly Mrs. Glubbes—burst into Doctor Georges' dining room while the family was at dinner. She was brandishing a pistol and screaming, 'You stole my baby! You gave me the wrong baby! Where's my baby?'

"When the doctor assured her that there was no other baby, she fired, shattering his salad plate. Glancing off it, the bullet pierced his heart. The woman fled. A peculiar feature of the case is that Mrs. Glubbes, the alleged intruder, *has no baby*. Just a minute—just a minute—here comes the stretcher now."

Norris turned the set off and went to call the police. He told them what he knew and promised to make himself available for questioning if it became necessary. When he turned from the phone, Anne was standing in the bedroom doorway. She might have been crying a little, but she concealed it well.

"What was all that?" she asked.

"Woman killed a man. I happened to know the motive."

"What was it?"

"Neutroid trouble."

"You meet up with a lot of unpleasantness in this business, don't you?"

"Lot of unpleasant emotions tangled up in it," he admitted.

"I know. Well, supper's been keeping hot for two hours. Shall we eat?"

THEY went to bed at midnight, but it was after one when he became certain that his wife was asleep. He lay in darkness for a time, listening to her even breathing. Then he cautiously eased himself out of bed and tiptoed quietly through the door, carrying his shoes and trousers. He put them on in the kitchen and stole silently out to the kennels. A half moon hung low in a misty sky, and the wind was chilly out of the north.

He went into the neutroid room and flicked a switch. A few sleepy chatters greeted the light.

One at a time, he awoke twenty-three of the older doll-things and carried them to a large glass-walled compartment. These were the long-time residents; they knew him well, and they came

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h him willingly—like children
er the Piper of Hamlin. When
had gotten them in the glass
mber, he sealed the door and
ned on the gas. The conveyor
uld automatically carry them
to the incinerator.

Now he had enough cages for
Bermuda-K-99s.

He hurriedly quit the kennels
d went to sit on the back steps.
s eyes were burning, but the
ught of tears made him sicker.
was like an assassin crying
ile he stabbed his victim. It
s more honest just to retch.

When he tiptoed back inside,
got as far as the hall. Then he
Anne's small figure framed
the bedroom window, silhou-
ed against the moonlit yard.
e had slipped into her negligee
d was sitting on the narrow
ndowstool, staring silently out
the dull red tongue of exhaust
es from the crematory's chim-
y.

Norris backed away. He went
the parlor and lay down on
couch.

After a while he heard her
ne into the room. She paused
the center of the rug, a fragile
t in the darkness. He turned
face away and waited for the
ing accusation. But soon she
e to sit on the edge of the
. She said nothing. Her hand
t out and touched his cheek
tly. He felt her cool finger-
tips trace a soft line up his temple.

"It's all right, Terry," she whispered.

He kept his face averted. Her fingers traced a last stroke. Then she padded quietly back to the bedroom. He lay awake until dawn, knowing that it would never be all right, neither the creating nor the killing, until he — and the whole world — completely lost sanity. And then everything would be all right, only it still wouldn't make sense.

ANNE was asleep when he left the house. The night mist had gathered into clouds that made a gloomy morning of it. He drove on out in the kennel-truck, meaning to get the rest of the Bermuda-K-99s so that he could begin his testing.

Still he felt the night's guilt, like a sticky dew that refused to depart with morning. Why should he have to kill the things? The answer was obvious. Society manufactured them because killing them was permissible. Human babies could not be disposed of when the market became glutted. The neutroids offered solace to childless women, kept them satisfied with a restricted birth rate. And why a restricted birth rate? Because by keeping the population at five billions, the Federation could insure a decent living

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standard for everybody.

Where there was giving, Norris thought glumly, there was also taking away. Man had always deluded himself by thinking that he "created," but he created nothing. He thought that he had created—with his medical science and his end to wars—a longer life for the individual. But he found that he had only taken the lives of the unborn and added them to the years of the aged. Man now had a life expectancy of eighty, except that he had damn little chance of being born to enjoy it.

A neutroid filled the cradle in his stead. A neutroid that never ate as much, or grew up to be unemployed. A neutroid could be killed if things got tough, but could still satisfy a woman's craving to mother something small.

Norris gave up thinking about it. Eventually he would have to adjust to it. He was already adjusted to a world that loved the artificial mutants as children. He had been brought up in it. Emotion came in conflict with the grim necessities of his job. Somehow he would have to love them in the parlor and kill them in the kennel. It was only a matter of adjustment.

AT noon, he brought back another dozen K-99s and installed them in his cages. There had been two highly reluctant mothers, but he skipped them and left the seizure to the local authorities. Yates had already brought in the three from yesterday.

"No more scratches?" Anne asked him while they ate lunch. They did not speak of the night's mass-disposal.

Norris smiled mechanically. "I learned my lesson yesterday. If they bare their fangs, I get out without another word. Funny thing though—I've got a feeling one mother pulled a fast one."

"What happened?"

"Well, I told her what I wanted and why. She didn't like it, but she let me in. I started out with her newt, but she wanted a receipt. So I gave her one; took the serial number off my checklist. She looked at it and said, 'Why, that's not Chichi's number!' I looked at the newt's foot, and sure enough it wasn't. I had to leave it. It was a K-99, but not even from Bermuda."

"I thought they were all registered," Anne said.

"They are. I told her she had the wrong neutroid, but she got mad. Went and got the sales receipt. It checked with her newt and it was from O'Reilley's pet shop—right place, wrong number. I just don't get it."

"Nothing to worry about, is it Terry?"

He looked at her peculiarly.

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"Ever think what might happen if someone started a black market in neutroids?"

They finished the meal in silence. After lunch he went out again to gather up the rest of the group. By four o'clock, he had gotten all that were to be had without the threat of a warrant. The screams and pleas and tears of the owners left him gloomily despising himself.

If Delmont's falsification had been widespread, he might have to turn several of the thirty-five over to central lab for dissection and ultimate destruction. That would bring the murderous wrath of their owners down upon him. He began to understand why bio-inspectors were frequently shifted from one territory to another.

On the way home, he stopped in Sherman II to check on the missing number. It was the largest of the Sherman communities, covering fifty blocks of commercial buildings. He parked in the outskirts and took a sidewalk escalator toward O'Reilley's address.

It was on a dingy sidestreet, reminiscent of past centuries, a street of small bars and bowling alleys and cigar stores. There was even a shop with three gold balls above the entrance, but the place was now an antique store. A light mist was falling when he stepped off the escalator and stood in front of the pet shop. A sign hung out over the sidewalk, announcing:

J. "DOGGY" O'REILLEY
PETS FOR SALE
DUMB BLONDES AND GOLDFISH
MUTANTS FOR THE CHILDLESS
BUY A BUNDLE OF JOY

Norris frowned at the sign and wandered inside. The place was warm and gloomy. He wrinkled his nose at the strong musk of animal odors. O'Reilley's was not a shining example of cleanliness.

Somewhere a puppy was yapping, and a parrot croaked the lyrics of *A Chimp to Call My Own,* which Norris recognized as the theme song of a popular soap-opera about a lady evolvotron operator.

He paused briefly by a tank of silk-draped goldfish. The shop had a customer. An elderly lady was haggling with a wizened manager over the price of a half grown second-hand dog-F. She was shaking her last dog's death certificate under his nose and demanding a guarantee of the dog's alleged F-5 intelligence. The old man offered to swear on a Bible, but he demurred when it came to swearing on a ledger.

The dog was saying, "Don' sell me, Dada. Don' sell me."

Norris smiled sardonically to himself. The non-human pets were smarter than the neutroids.

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A K-108 could speak a dozen words, and a K-99 never got farther than "mamma," "pappa," and "cookie." Anthropos was afraid to make the quasi-humans too intelligent, lest sentimentalists proclaim them really human.

He wandered on toward the back of the building, pausing briefly by the cash register to inspect O'Reilley's license, which hung in a dusty frame on the wall behind the counter. "James Fallon O'Reilley . . . authorized dealer in mutant animals . . . all non-predatory mammals including champanzee-K series . . . license expires June 1, 2235."

It seemed in order, although the expiration date was approaching. He started toward a bank of neutroid cages along the opposite wall, but O'Reilley was mincing across the floor to meet him. The customer had gone. The little manager wore an elfan professional smile, and his bald head bobbled in a welcoming nod.

"Good day, sir, good day! May I show you a dwarf kangaroo, or a—" He stopped and adjusted his spectacles. He blinked and peered as Norris flashed his badge. His smile waned.

"I'm Agent Norris, Mr. O'Reilley. Called you yesterday for that rundown on K-99 sales."

O'Reilley looked suddenly nervous. "Oh, yes. Find 'em all?"

Norris shook his head. "No. That's why I stopped by. There's some mistake on—" he glanced at his list—"on K-99-LJZ-351. Let's check it again."

O'Reilley seemed to cringe. "No mistake. I gave you the buyer's name."

"She has a different number."

"Can I help it if she traded with somebody?"

"She didn't. She bought it here. I saw the receipt."

"Then she traded with one of my other customers!" snapped the old man.

"Two of your customers have the same name—Adelia Schultz? Not likely. Let's see your duplicate receipt book."

O'Reilley's wrinkled face set itself into a stubborn mask. "Doubt if it's still around."

Norris frowned. "Look, pop, I've had a rough day. I *could* start naming some things around here that need fixing — sanitary violations and such. Not to mention that sign—'dumb blondes.' They outlawed that one when they executed that shyster doctor for shooting K-108s full of growth hormones, trying to raise himself a harem to sell. Besides, you're required to keep sales records until they've been microfilmed. There hasn't been a microfilming since July."

The wrinkled face twitched with frustrated anger. O'Reilley

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shuffled to the counter while Norris followed. He got a fat binder from under the register and started toward a wooden stairway.

"Where you going?" Norris called.

"Get my old glasses," the manager grumbled. "Can't see through these new things."

"Leave the book here and *I'll* check it," Norris offered.

But O'Reilley was already limping quickly up the stairs. He seemed not to hear. He shut the door behind him, and Norris heard the lock click. The bio-agent waited. Again the thought of a black market troubled him. Unauthorized neutroids could mean lots of trouble.

FIVE minutes passed before the old man came down the stairs. He said nothing as he placed the book on the counter. Norris noticed that his hands were trembling as he shuffled through the pages.

"Let *me* look," said the bio-agent.

O'Reilley stepped reluctantly aside. Norris had memorized the owner's receipt number, and he found the duplicate quickly. He stared at it silently. "Mrs. Adele Schultz . . . chimpanzee-K-99-LJZ-351." It was the number of the animal he wanted, but it wasn't the number on Mrs. Schultz's neutroid nor on her original copy of the receipt.

He held the book up to his eye and aimed across the page at the light. O'Reilley's breathing became audible. Norris put the book down, folded two thicknesses of handkerchief over the blade of his pocketknife, and ran it down the seam between the pages. He took the sheet he wanted, folded it, and stowed it in his vest pocket. O'Reilley was stuttering angrily.

Norris turned to face him coldly. "Nice erasure job, for a carbon copy."

The old man prepared himself for exploding. Norris quietly put on his hat.

"See you in court, O'Reilley."

"*Wait!*"

Norris turned. "Okay, I'm waiting."

The old man sagged into a deflated bag of wrinkles. "Let's sit down first," he said weakly.

Norris followed him up the stairs and into a dingy parlor. The tiny apartment smelled of boiled cabbage and sweat. An orange-haired neutroid lay asleep on a small rug in a corner. Norris knelt beside it and read the tattooed figures on the sole of its left foot—K-99-LJZ-351. Somehow he was not surprised.

When he stood up, the old man was sagged in an ancient armchair, his head propped on a

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hand that covered his eyes.

"Lots of good explanations, I guess?" Norris asked quietly.

"Not good ones."

"Let's hear them, anyway."

O'Reilley sighed and straightened. He blinked at the inspector and spoke in a monotone. "My missus died five years back. We were class-B—allowed one child of our own—if we could have one. We couldn't. But since we were class-B, we couldn't own a neutroid either. Sorta got around it by running a pet shop. Mary—she always cried when we sold a neut. I sorta felt bad about it myself. But we never did swipe one. Last year this Bermuda shipment come in. I sold most of 'em pretty quick, but Peony here—she was kinda puny. Seemed like nobody wanted her. Kept her around so long, I got attached to her. 'Fraid somebody'd buy her. So I faked the receipt and moved her up here."

"That all?"

The old man nodded.

"Ever done this before?"

He shook his head.

Norris let a long silence pass while he struggled with himself. At last he said, "Your license could be revoked, you know."

"I know."

Norris ground his fist thoughtfully in his palm and stared at the sleeping doll-thing. "I'll take your books home with me tonight," he said. "I want to make a complete check for similar changes. Any objections?"

"None. It's the only trick I've pulled, so help me."

"If that's true, I won't report you. We'll just attach a correction to that page, and you'll put the newt back in stock." He hesitated. "Providing it's not a deviant. I'll have to take it in for examination."

A choking sound came from the armchair. Norris stared curiously at the old man. Moisture was creeping in the wrinkles around his eyes.

"Something the matter?"

O'Reilley nodded. "She's a deviant."

"How do you know?"

The dealer pulled himself erect and hobbled to the sleeping neutroid. He knelt beside it and stroked a small bare shoulder gently.

"Peony," he breathed. "Peony, girl—wake up."

Its fluffy tail twitched for a moment. Then it sat up, rubbing its eyes and yawning. It *looked* normal, like a two-year-old girl with soft brown eyes. It pouted at O'Reilley for awakening it. It saw Norris and ignored him, apparently too sleepy to be frightened.

"How's my Peony-girl?" the dealer purred.

It licked its lips. "Wanna g'ass

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o' water, Daddy," it said drowsily.

Norris caught his breath: No K-99 should be able to make a speech that long, even when it reached the developmental limit. He glanced at O'Reilley. The old man nodded slowly, then went to the kitchen for a glass of water. She drank greedily and eyed her foster-parent.

"Daddy crying."

O'Reilley glowered at her and blew his nose solemnly. "Don't be silly, child. Now get your coat on and go with Mister Norris. He's taking you for a ride in his truck. Won't that be fine?"

"I don't want to. I wanna stay here."

"Pe*eony!* On with you!"

She brought her coat and stared at Norris with childish contempt. "Can Daddy go, too?"

"Be on your way!" growled O'Reilley. "I got things to do."

"We're coming back?"

"Of course you're coming back! *Git* now — or shall I get my spanking switch?"

Peony strolled out the door ahead of Norris.

"Oh, inspector, would you be punching the night latch for me as you leave the shop? I think I'll be closing for the day."

Norris paused at the head of the stairs, looking back at the old man. But O'Reilley closed himself inside and the lock clicked. The agent sighed and glanced down at the small being beside him.

"Want me to carry you, Peony?"

She sniffed disdainfully. She hopped upon the banister and slid down ahead of him. Her motor-responses were typically neutroid — something like a monkey, something like a squirrel. But there was no question about it; she was one of Delmont's deviants. He wondered what they would do with her in central lab. He could remember no instance of an intelligent mutant getting into the market.

Somehow he could not consign her to a cage in the back of the truck. He drove home while she sat beside him on the front seat. She watched the scenery and remained aloof, occasionally looking around to ask, "Can we go back now?"

Norris could not bring himself to answer.

WHEN he got home, he led her into the house and stopped in the hall to call Chief Franklin. The operator said, "His office doesn't answer, sir. Shall I give you the robot locator?"

Norris hesitated. His wife came into the hall. She stooped to grin at Peony, and Peony said, "Do you live here, too?" Anne gasped and sat on the floor to stare.

Norris said, "Cancel the call.

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It'll wait till tomorrow." He dropped the phone quickly.

"What series is it?" Anne asked excitedly. "I never saw one that could talk."

"*It* is a *she*," he said. "And she's a series unto herself. Some of Delmont's work."

Peony was looking from one to the other of them with a baffled face. "Can we go back now?"

Norris shook his head. "You're going to spend the night with us, Peony," he said softly. "Your daddy wants you to."

His wife was watching him thoughtfully. Norris looked aside and plucked nervously at a corner of the telephone book. Suddenly she caught Peony's hand and led her toward the kitchen.

"Come on, baby, let's go find a cookie or something."

Norris started out the front door, but in a moment Anne was back. She caught at his collar and tugged. "Not so fast!"

He turned to frown. Her face accused him at a six-inch range.

"Just what do you think you're going to do with that child?"

He was silent for a long time. "You know what I'm *supposed* to do."

Her unchanging stare told him that she wouldn't accept any evasions. "I heard you trying to get your boss on the phone."

"I canceled it, didn't I?"

"Until tomorrow."

He worked his hands nervously. "I don't know, honey—I just don't know."

"They'd kill her at central lab, wouldn't they?"

"Well, they'd need her as evidence in Delmont's trial."

"They'd kill her, wouldn't they?"

"When it was over—it's hard to say. The law says deviants must be destroyed, but—"

"Well?"

He paused miserably. "We've got a few days to think about it, honey. I don't have to make my report for a week."

He sidled out the door. Looking back, he saw the hard determination in her eyes as she watched him. He knew somehow that he was going to lose either his job or his wife. Maybe both. He shuffled moodily out to the kennels to care for his charges.

A GREAT silence filled the house during the evening. Supper was a gloomy meal. Only Peony spoke; she sat propped on two cushions at the table, using her silver with remarkable skill.

Norris wondered about her intelligence. Her chronological age was ten months; her physical age was about two years; but her mental age seemed to compare favorably with at least a three year old.

Once he reached across the ta-

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ble to touch her forehead. She eyed him curiously for a moment and continued eating. Her temperature was warmer than human, but not too warm for the normally high neutroid metabolism — somewhere around 101°. The rapid rate of maturation made I.Q. determination impossible.

"You've got a good appetite, Peony," Anne remarked.

"I like Daddy's cooking better," she said with innocent bluntness. "When can I go home?"

Anne looked at Norris and waited for an answer. He managed a smile at the flame-haired cherub. "Tell you what we'll do. I'll call your daddy on the phone and let you say hello. Would you like that?"

She giggled, then nodded. "Uh-huh! When can we do it?"

"Later."

Anne tapped her fork thoughtfully against the edge of her plate. "I think we better have a nice long talk tonight, Terry," she said.

"Is there anything to talk about?" He pushed the plate away. "I'm not hungry."

HE left the table and went to sit in darkness by the parlor window, while his wife did the dishes and Peony played with a handful of walnuts on the kitchen floor.

He watched the scattered lights of the suburbs and tried to think of nothing. The lights were peaceful, glimmering through the trees.

Once there had been no lights, only the flickering campfires of hunters shivering in the forest, when the world was young and sparsely planted with the seed of Man. Now the world was infected with his lights, and with the sound of his engines and the roar of his rockets. He had inherited the Earth and had filled it — too full.

There was no escape. His rockets had touched two of the planets, but even the new worlds offered no sanctuary for the unborn. Man could have babies—if allowed — faster than he could build ships to haul them away. He could only choose between a higher death rate and a lower birth rate.

And unborn children were not eligible to vote when Man made his choice.

His choice had robbed his wife of a biological need, and so he made a disposable baby with which to pacify her. He gave it a tail and only half a mind, so that it could not be confused with his own occasional children.

But Peony had only the tail. Still she was not born of the seed of Man. Strange seed, out of the jungle, warped toward the human pole, but still not human.

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NORRIS heard a car approaching in the street. Its headlights swung along the curb, and it slowed to a halt in front of the house. A tall, slender man in a dark suit climbed out and stood for a moment, staring toward the house. He was only a shadow in the faint street light. Norris could not place him. Suddenly the man snapped on a flashlight and played it over the porch. Norris caught his breath and darted toward the kitchen. Anne stared at him questioningly, while Peony peered up from her play.

He stooped beside her. "Listen, child!" he said quickly. "Do you know what a neutroid is?"

She nodded slowly. "They play in cages. They don't talk."

"Can you pretend you're a neutroid?"

"I can play neutroid. I play neutroid with Daddy sometimes, when people come to see him. He gives me candy when I play it. When can I go home?"

"Not now. There's a man coming to see us. Can you play neutroid for me? We'll give you lots of candy. Just don't talk. Pretend you're asleep."

"Now?"

"Now." He heard the door chimes ringing.

"Who is it?" Anne asked.

"I don't know. He may have the wrong house. Take Peony in the bedroom. I'll answer it."

His wife caught the child-thing up in her arms and hurried away. The chimes sounded again. Norris stalked down the hall and switched on the porch-light. The visitor was an elderly man, erect in his black suit and radiating dignity. As he smiled and nodded, Norris noticed his collar. A clergyman. Must have the wrong place, Norris thought.

"Are you Inspector Norris?"

The agent nodded, not daring to talk.

"I'm Father Paulson. I'm calling on behalf of a James O'Reilley. I think you know him. May I come in?"

Grudgingly, Norris swung open the door. "If you can stand the smell of paganism, come on in."

The priest chuckled politely. Norris led him to the parlor and turned on the light. He waved toward a chair.

"What's this all about? Does O'Reilley want something?"

Paulson smiled at the inspector's brusque tone and settled himself in the chair. "O'Reilley is a sick man," he said.

The inspector frowned. "He didn't look it to me."

"Sick of heart, Inspector. He came to me for advice. I couldn't give him any. He told me the story—about this Peony. I came to have a look at her, if I may."

Norris said nothing for a moment. O'Reilley had better keep

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his mouth shut, he thought, especially around clergymen. Most of them took a dim view of the whole mutant business.

"I didn't think you'd associate with O'Reilley," he said. "I thought you people excommunicated everybody that owns a neutroid. O'Reilley owns a whole shopful."

"That's true. But who knows? He might get rid of his shop. May I see this neutroid?"

"Why?"

"O'Reilley said it could talk. Is that true or is O'Reilley suffering delusions? That's what I came to find out."

"Neutroids don't talk."

The priest stared at him for a time, then nodded slowly, as if approving something. "You can rest assured," he said quietly, "that I'll say nothing of this visit, that I'll speak to no one about this creature."

Norris looked up to see his wife watching them from the doorway.

"Get Peony," he said.

"It's true then?" Paulson asked.

"I'll let you see for yourself."

Anne brought the small childthing into the room and set her on the floor. Peony saw the visitor, chattered with fright, and bounded upon the back of the sofa to sit and scold. She was playing her game well, Norris thought.

The priest watched her with quiet interest. "Hello, little one."

Peony babbled gibberish. Paulson kept his eyes on her every movement. Suddenly he said, "I just saw your daddy, Peony. He wanted me to talk to you."

Her babbling ceased. The spell of the game was ended. Her eyes went sober. Then she looked at Norris and pouted. "I don't want any candy. I wanna go home."

Norris let out a deep breath. "I didn't say she couldn't talk," he pointed out sullenly.

"I didn't say you did," said Paulson. "You invited me to see for myself."

Anne confronted the clergyman. "What do you want?" she demanded. "The child's death? Did you come to assure yourself that she'd be turned over to the lab? I know your kind! You'd do anything to get rid of neutroids!"

"I came only to assure myself that O'Reilley's sane," Paulson told her.

"I don't believe you," she snapped.

He stared at her in wounded surprise; then he chuckled. "People used to trust the cloth. Ah, well. Listen, my child, you have us wrong. We say it's evil to create the creatures. We say *also* that it's evil to destroy them after they're made. Not murder, exactly but—mockery of life, perhaps. It's the entire institution that's

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evil. Do you understand? As for this small creature of O'Reilley's —well, I hardly know what to make of her, but I certainly w o u l d n ' t wish her — uh — d-e-a-d."

Peony was listening solemnly to the conversation. Somehow Norris sensed a disinterested friend, if not an ally, in the priest. He looked at his wife. Her eyes were still suspicious.

"Tell me, Father," Norris asked, "if you were in my position, what would you do?"

Paulson fumbled with a button of his coat and stared at the floor while he pondered. "I wouldn't be in your position, young man. But if I were, I think I'd withhold her from my superiors. I'd also quit my job and go away."

It wasn't what Norris wanted to hear. But his wife's expression suddenly changed; she looked at the priest with a new interest. "And give Peony back to O'Reilley," she added.

"I shouldn't be giving you advice," he said unhappily. "I'm duty-bound to ask O'Reilley to give up his business and have nothing further to do with neutroids."

"But Peony's *human*," Anne argued. "She's *different*."

"I fail to agree."

"What!" Anne confronted him again. "What makes *you* human?"

"A soul, my child."

Anne put her hands on her hips and leaned forward to glare down at him like something unwholesome. "Can you put a voltmeter between your ears and measure it?"

The priest looked helplessly at Norris.

"*No!*" she said. "And you can't do it to Peony either!"

"Perhaps I had better go," Paulson said to his host.

Norris sighed. "Maybe you better, Padre. You found out what you wanted to know."

Anne stalked angrily out of the room, her dark hair swishing like a battle-pennant with each step. When the priest was gone, Norris picked up the child and held her in his lap. She was shivering with fright, as if she understood what had been said. Love them in the parlor, he thought, and kill them in the kennels.

"Can I go home? Doesn't Daddy want me any more?"

"Sure he does, baby. You just be good and everything'll be all right."

NORRIS felt a bad taste in his mouth as he laid her sleeping body on the sofa half an hour later. Everything was all wrong and it promised to remain that way. He couldn't give her back to O'Reilley, because she would be caught again when the auditor

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came to microfilm the records. And he certainly couldn't keep her himself—not with other Bio-agents wandering in and out every few days. She could not be concealed in a world where there were no longer any sparsely populated regions. There was nothing to do but obey the law and turn her over to Franklin's lab.

He closed his eyes and shuddered. If he did that, he could do anything — stomach anything — adapt to any vicious demands society made of him. If he sent the child away to die, he would know that he had attained an "objective" outlook. And what more could he want from life than adaptation and objectivity?

Well—his wife, for one thing.

He left the child on the sofa, turned out the light, and wandered into the bedroom. Anne was in bed, reading. She did not look up when she said, "Terry, if you let that baby be destroyed, I'll..."

"Don't say it," he cut in. "Any time you feel like leaving, you just leave. But don't threaten me with it."

She watched him silently for a moment. Then she handed him the newspaper she had been reading. It was folded around an advertisement.

BIOLOGISTS WANTED
by
ANTHROPOS INCORPORATED
for
Evolvotron Operators
Incubator Tenders
Nursery Supervisors
Laboratory Personnel
in
NEW ATLANTA PLANT
Call or write: Personnel Mgr.
ANTHROPOS INC.
Atlanta, Ga.
Note: Secure Work Department release from present job before applying.

He looked at Anne curiously. "So?"

She shrugged. "So there's a job, if you want to quit this one."

"What's this got to do with Peony, if anything?"

"We could take her with us."

"Not a chance," he said. "Do you suppose a talking neutroid would be any safer there?"

She demanded angrily, "Why should they want to destroy her?"

Norris sat on the edge of the bed and thought about it. "No particular *individual* wants to, honey. It's the law."

"But *why?*"

"Generally, because deviants are unknown quantities. They can be dangerous."

"That child—*dangerous?*"

"Dangerous to a concept, a vague belief that Man is something special, a closed tribe. And in a practical sense, she's dangerous because she's not a neuter. The Federation insists that all mutants be neuter and infertile, so it can control the mutant population. If mutants started repro-

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ducing, that could be a real threat in a world whose economy is so delicately balanced."

"Well, you're not going to let them have her, do you hear me?"

"I hear you," he grumbled.

ON the following day, he went down to police headquarters to sign a statement concerning the motive in Doctor Georges' murder. As a result, Mrs. Glubbes was put away in the psycho-ward.

"It's funny, Norris," said Chief Miler, "what people'll do over a neutroid. Like Mrs. Glubbes thinking that newt was her own. I sure don't envy you your job. It's a wonder you don't get your head blown off. You must have an iron stomach."

Norris signed the paper and looked up briefly. "Sure, Chief. Just a matter of adaptation."

"Guess so." Miler patted his paunch and yawned. "How you coming on this Delmont business? Picked up any deviants yet?"

Norris laid down the pen abruptly. "No! Of course not! What made you think I had?"

Miler stopped in the middle of his yawn and stared at Norris curiously. "Touchy, aren't you?" he asked thoughtfully. "When I get that kind of answer from a prisoner, I right away start thinking—"

"Save it for your interrogation room," Norris growled. He stalked quickly out of the office while Chief Miler tapped his pencil absently and stared after him.

He was angry with himself for his indecision. He had to make a choice and make it *soon*. He was climbing in his car when a voice called after him from the building. He looked back to see Chief Miler trotting down the steps, his pudgy face glistening in the morning sun.

"Hey, Norris! Your missus is on the phone. Says it's urgent."

Norris went back grudgingly. A premonition of trouble gripped him.

"Phone's right there," the chief said, pointing with a stubby thumb.

The receiver lay on the desk, and he could hear it saying, "Hello—hello—" before he picked it up.

"Anne? What's the matter?"

Her voice was low and strained, trying to be cheerful. "Nothing's the matter, darling. We have a visitor. Come right home, will you? Chief Franklin's here."

It knocked the breath out of him. He felt himself going white. He glanced at Chief Miler, calmly sitting nearby.

"Can you tell me about it now?" he asked her.

"Not very well. Please hurry home. He wants to talk to you about the K-99s."

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"Have the two of them met?"

"Yes, they have." She paused, as if listening to him speak, then said, "Oh, *that!* The game, honey—remember the *game?*"

"Good," he grunted. "I'll be right there." He hung up and started out.

"Troubles?" the chief called after him.

"Just a sick newt," he said, "if it's any of your business."

CHIEF Franklin's helicopter was parked in the empty lot next door when Norris drove up in front of the house. The official heard the truck and came out on the porch to watch his agent walk up the path. His lanky, emaciated body was loosely draped in gray tweeds, and his thin hawk face was a dark and solemn mask. He was a middle-aged man, his skin seamed with wrinkles, but his hair was still abnormally black. He greeted Norris with a slow, almost sarcastic nod.

"I see you don't read your mail. If you'd looked at it, you'd have known I was coming. I wrote you yesterday."

"Sorry, Chief, I didn't have a chance to stop by the message office this morning."

Franklin grunted. "Then you don't know why I'm here?"

"No, sir."

"Let's sit out on the porch," Franklin said, and perched his bony frame on the railing. "We've got to get busy on these Bermuda-K-99s, Norris. How many have you got?"

"Thirty-four, I think."

"I counted thirty-five."

"Maybe you're right. I—I'm not sure."

"Found any deviants yet?"

"Uh—I haven't run any tests yet, sir."

Franklin's voice went sharp. "Do you need a test to know when a neutroid is talking a blue streak?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. We've found at least a dozen of Delmont's units that have mental ages that correspond to their physical age. What's more, they're functioning females, and they have normal pituitaries. Know what that means?"

"They won't take an age-set then," Norris said. "They'll grow to adulthood."

"And have children."

Norris frowned. "How can they have children? There aren't any males."

"No? Guess what we found in one of Delmont's incubators."

"Not a—"

"Yeah. And it's probably not the first. This business about padding his quota is baloney! Hell, man, he was going to start his own black market! He finally admitted it, after twenty-hours' questioning without a letup. He

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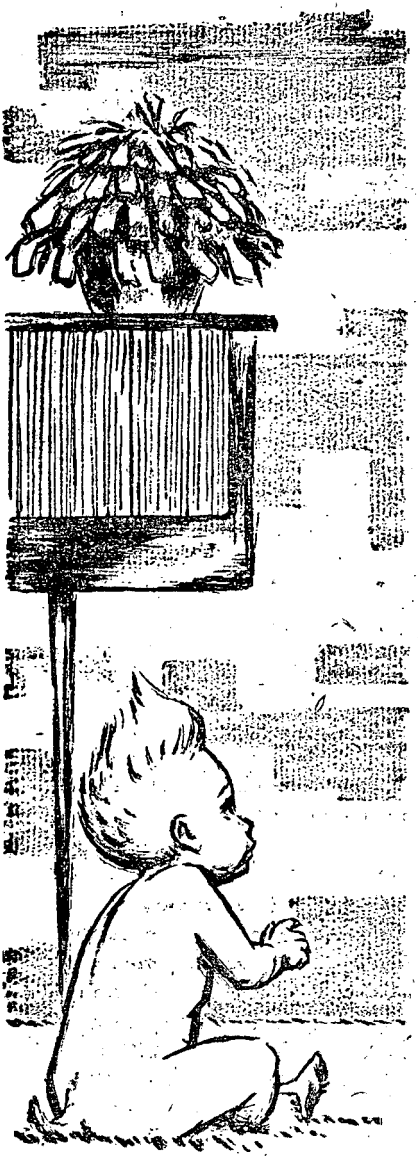

was going to raise them, Norris. He was stealing them right out of the incubators before an inspector ever saw them. The K-99s—the numbered ones—are just the ones he couldn't get back. Lord knows how many males he's got hidden away someplace!"

"What're you going to do?"

"*Do!* What do you *think* we'll do? Smash the whole scheme, that's what! Find the deviants and kill them. We've got enough now for lab work."

Norris felt sick. He looked away. "I suppose you'll want me to handle the destruction, then."

Franklin gave him a suspicious glance. "Yes, but why do you ask? You *have* found one, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," he admitted.

A moan came from the doorway. Norris looked up to see his wife's white face staring at him in horror, just before she turned and fled into the house. Franklin's bony head lifted.

"I see," he said. "We have a fixation on our deviant. Very well, Norris, I'll take care of it myself. Where is it?"

"In the house, sir. My wife's bedroom."

"Get it."

NORRIS went glumly in the house. The bedroom door was locked.

"Honey," he called softly.

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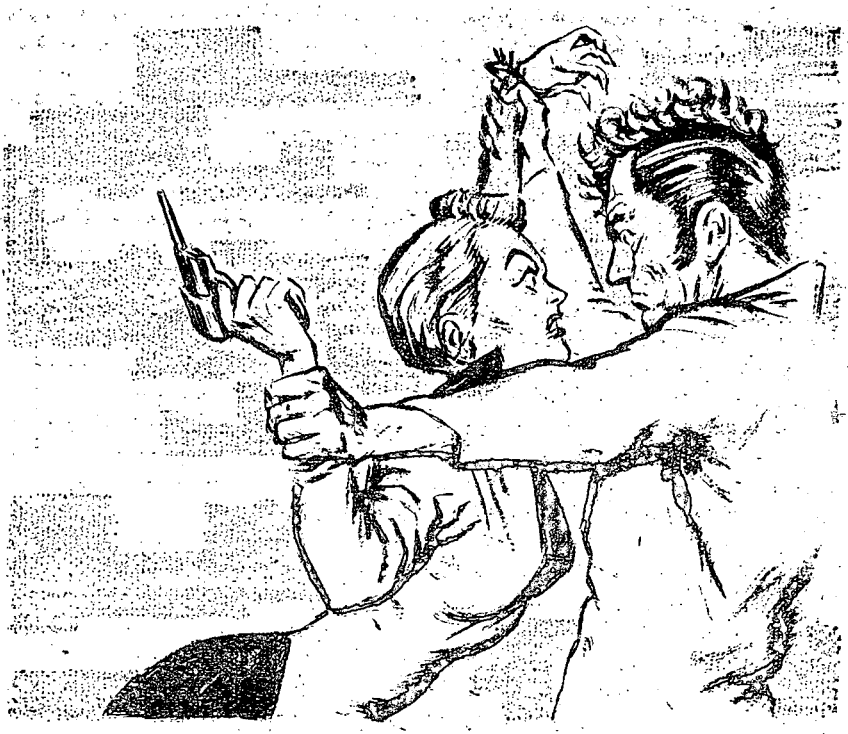

There was no answer. He knocked gently.

A key turned in the lock, and his wife stood facing him. Her eyes were weeping ice.

"Stay back!" she said. He could see Peony behind her, sitting in the center of the floor and looking mystified.

Then he saw his own service revolver in her trembling hand.

"Look, honey—it's *me*."

She shook her head. "No, it's not you. It's a man that wants to kill a little girl. Stay back."

"You'd shoot, wouldn't you?" he asked softly.

"Try to come in and find out," she invited.

"Let me have Peony."

She laughed, her eyes bright with hate. "I wonder where Terry went. I guess he died. Or adapted. I guess I'm a widow now. Stay back, Mister, or I'll kill you."

Norris smiled. "Okay, I'll stay back. But the gun isn't loaded."

She tried to slam the door; he

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caught it with his foot. She struck at him with the pistol, but he dragged it out of her hand. He pushed her aside and held her against the wall while she clawed at his arm.

"Stop it!" he said. "Nothing will happen to Peony, I promise you!" He glanced back at the child-thing, who had begun to cry.

Anne subsided a little, staring at him angrily.

"There's no other way out, honey. Just trust me. She'll be all right."

Breathing quickly, Anne stood aside and watched him. "Okay, Terry. But if you're lying—tell me, is it murder to kill a man to protect a child?"

Norris lifted Peony in his arms. Her wailing ceased, but her tail switched nervously.

"In whose law book?" he asked his wife. "I was wondering the same thing." Norris started toward the door. "By the way—find my instruments while I'm outside, will you?"

"The dissecting instruments?" she gasped. "If you intend—"

"Let's call them surgical instruments, shall we? And get them sterilized."

He went on outside, carrying the child. Franklin was waiting for him in the kennel doorway.

"Was that Mrs. Norris I heard screaming?"

Norris nodded. "Let's get this over with. I don't stomach it so well." He let his eyes rest unhappily on the top of Peony's head.

Franklin grinned at her and took a bit of candy out of his pocket. She refused it and snuggled closer to Norris.

"When can I go home?" she piped. "I want Daddy."

Franklin straightened, watching her with amusement. "You're going home in a few minutes, little newt. Just a few minutes."

They went into the kennels together, and Franklin headed straight for the third room. He seemed to be enjoying the situation. Norris hating him silently, stopped at a workbench and pulled on a pair of gloves. Then he called after Franklin.

"Chief, since you're in there, check the outlet pressure while I turn on the main line, will you?"

Franklin nodded assent. He stood outside the gas-chamber, watching the dials on the door. Norris could see his back while he twisted the main-line valve.

"Pressure's up!" Franklin called.

"Okay. Leave the hatch ajar so it won't lock, and crack the intake valves. Read it again."

"Got a mask for me?"

Norris laughed. "If you're scared, there's one on the shelf. But just open the hatch, take a

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reading, and close it. There's no danger."

Franklin frowned at him and cracked the intakes. Norris quietly closed the main valve again.

"Drops to zero!" Franklin called.

"Leave it open, then. Smell anything?"

"No. I'm turning it off, Norris." He twisted the intakes.

Simultaneously, Norris opened the main line.

"Pressure's up again!"

Norris dropped his wrench and walked back to the chamber, leaving Peony perched on the workbench.

"Trouble with the intakes," he said gruffly. "It's happened before. Mind getting your hands dirty with me, Chief?"

Franklin frowned irritably. "Let's hurry this up, Norris. I've got five territories to visit."

"Okay, but we'd better put on our masks." He climbed a metal ladder to the top of the chamber, leaned over to inspect the intakes. On his way down, he shouldered a light-bulb over the door, shattering it. Franklin cursed and stepped back, brushing glass fragments from his head and shoulders.

"Good thing the light was off," he snapped.

Norris handed him the gas-mask and put on his own. "The main switch is off," he said. He opened the intakes again. This time the dials fell to normal open-line pressure. "Well, look—it's okay," he called through the mask. "You sure it was zero before?"

"Of course I'm sure!" came the muffled reply.

"Leave it on for a minute. We'll see. I'll go get the newt. Don't let the door close, sir. It'll start the automatics and we can't get it open for half an hour."

"I know, Norris. Hurry up."

Norris left him standing just outside the chamber, propping the door open with his foot. A faint wind was coming through the opening. It should reach an explosive mixture quickly with the hatch ajar.

He stepped into the next room, waited a moment, and jerked the switch. The roar was deafening as the exposed tungsten filament flared and detonated the escaping anesthetic vapor. Norris went to cut off the main line. Peony was crying plaintively. He moved to the door and glanced at the smouldering remains of Franklin.

FEELING no emotion whatever, Norris left the kennels, carrying the sobbing child under one arm. His wife stared at him without understanding.

"Here, hold Peony while I call the police," he said.

"*Police?* What's happened?"

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He dialed quickly. "Chief Miler? This is Norris. Get over here quick. My gas chamber exploded — killed Chief Agent Franklin. Man, it's awful! Hurry."

He hung up and went back to the kennels. He selected a normal Bermuda-K-99 and coldly killed it with a wrench. "You'll serve for a deviant," he said, and left it lying in the middle of the floor.

Then he went back to the house, mixed a sleeping capsule in a glass of water, and forced Peony to drink it.

"So she'll be out when the cops come," he explained to Anne.

She stamped her foot. "Will you tell me what's happened?"

"You heard me on the phone. Franklin accidentally died. That's all you have to know."

He carried Peony out and locked her in a cage. She was too sleepy to protest, and she was dozing when the police came.

Chief Miler strode about the three rooms like a man looking for a burglar at midnight. He nudged the body of the neutroid with his foot. "What's this, Norris?"

"The deviant we were about to destroy. I finished her with a wrench."

"I thought you said there weren't any deviants."

"As far as the public's concerned, there aren't. I couldn't see that it was any of your business. It still isn't."

"I see. It may become my business, though. How'd the blast happen?"

Norris told him the story up to the point of the detonation. "The light over the door was loose. Kept flickering on and off. Franklin reached up to tighten it. Must have been a little gas in the socket. Soon as he touched it—wham!"

"Why was the door open with the gas on?"

"I told you—we were checking the intakes. If you close the door, it starts the automatics. Then you can't get it open till the cycle's finished."

"Where were you?"

"I'd gone to cut off the gas again."

"Okay, stay in the house until we're finished out here."

WHEN Norris went back in the house, his wife's white face turned slowly toward him.

She sat stiffly by the living room window, looking sick. Her voice was quietly frightened.

"Terry, I'm sorry about everything."

"Skip it."

"What did you do?"

He grinned sourly. "I adapted to an era. Did you find the instruments?"

She nodded. "What are they for?"

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"To cut off a tail and skin a tattooed foot. Go to the store and buy some brown hair-dye and a pair of boy's trousers, age two. Peony's going to get a crew-cut. From now on, she's Mike."

"We're class-C, Terry! We can't pass her off as our own."

"We're class-A, honey. I'm going to forge a heredity certificate."

Anne put her face in her hands and rocked slowly to and fro.

"Don't feel bad, baby. It was Franklin or a little girl. And from now on, it's society or the Norrises."

"What'll we do?"

"Go to Atlanta and work for Anthropos. I'll take up where Delmont left off."

"*Terry!*"

"Peony will need a husband. They may find all of Delmont's males. I'll *make* her one. Then we'll see if a pair of chimp-Ks can do better than their makers."

Wearily, he stretched out on the sofa.

"What about that priest? Suppose he tells about Peony. Suppose he guesses about Franklin and tells the police?"

"The police," he said, "would then smell a motive. They'd figure it out and I'd be finished. We'll wait and see. Let's don't talk; I'm tired. We'll just wait for Miler to come in."

She began rubbing his temples gently, and he smiled.

"So we wait," she said. "Shall I read to you, Terry?"

"That would be pleasant," he murmured, closing his eyes.

She slipped away, but returned quickly. He heard the rustle of dry pages and smelled musty leather. Then her voice came, speaking old words softly. And he thought of the small child-thing lying peacefully in her cage while angry men stalked about her. A small life with a mind; she came into the world as quietly as a thief, a burglar in the crowded house of Man.

"I will send my fear before thee, and I will destroy the peoples before whom thou shalt come, sending hornets to drive out the Hevite and the Canaanite and the Hethite before thou enterest the land. Little by little I will drive them out before thee, till thou be increased, and dost possess the land. Then shalt thou be to me a new people, and I to thee a God . . ."

And on the quiet afternoon in May, while he waited for the police to finish puzzling in the kennels, it seemed to Terrell Norris that an end to scheming and pushing and arrogance was not too far ahead. It should be a pretty good world then.

He hoped Man could fit into it somehow.

—WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

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DR. KOMETEVSKY'S DAY

By FRITZ LEIBER

Before science, there was superstition. After science, there will be . . . what? The biggest, most staggering, most final fact of them all!

"BUT it's all predicted here! It even names this century for the next reshuffling of the planets."

Celeste Wolver looked up unwillingly at the book her friend Madge Carnap held aloft like a torch. She made out the illstamped title, *The Dance of the Planets*. There was no mistaking the time of its origin; only paper from the Twentieth Century aged

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

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to that particularly nasty shade of brown. Indeed, the book seemed to Celeste a brown old witch resurrected from the Last Age of Madness to confound a world growing sane, and she couldn't help shrinking back a trifle toward her husband Theodor.

He tried to come to her rescue. "Only predicted in the vaguest way. As I understand it, Kometevsky claimed, on the basis of a lot of evidence drawn from folklore, that the planets and their moons trade positions every so often."

"As if they were playing Going to Jerusalem, or musical chairs," Celeste chimed in, but she couldn't make it sound funny.

"Jupiter was supposed to have started as the outermost planet, and is to end up in the orbit of Mercury," Theodor continued. "Well, nothing at all like that has happened."

"But it's begun," Madge said with conviction. "Phobos and Deimos have disappeared. You can't argue away that stubborn little fact."

That was the trouble; you couldn't. Mars' two tiny moons had simply vanished during a period when, as was generally the case, the eyes of astronomy weren't on them. Just some hundred-odd cubic miles of rock—the merest cosmic flyspecks—yet they had carried away with them the security of a whole world.

LOOKING at the lovely garden landscape around her, Celeste Wolver felt that in a moment the shrubby hills would begin to roll like waves, the charmingly aimless paths twist like snakes and sink in the green sea, the sparsely placed skyscrapers dissolve into the misty clouds they pierced.

People must have felt like this, she thought, *when Aristarches first hinted and Copernicus told them that the solid Earth under their feet was falling dizzily through space. Only it's worse for us, because they couldn't see that anything had changed. We can.*

"You need something to cling to," she heard Madge say. "Dr. Kometevsky was the only person who ever had an inkling that anything like this might happen. I was never a Kometevskyite before. Hadn't even heard of the man."

She said it almost apologetically. In fact, standing there so frank and anxious-eyed, Madge looked anything but a fanatic, which made it much worse.

"Of course, there are several more convincing alternate explanations . . ." Theodor began hesitantly, knowing very well that there weren't. If Phobos and Deimos had suddenly disinte-

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grated, surely Mars Base would have noticed something. Of course there was the Disordered Space Hypothesis, even if it was little more than the chance phrase of a prominent physicist pounded upon by an eager journalist. And in any case, what sense of security were you left with if you admitted that moons and planets might explode, or drop through unseen holes in space? So he ended up by taking a different tack: "Besides, if Phobos and Deimos simply shot off somewhere, surely they'd have been picked up by now by 'scope or radar."

"Two balls of rock just a few miles in diameter?" Madge questioned. "Aren't they smaller than many of the asteroids? I'm no astronomer, but I think I'm right."

And of course she was.

She swung the book under her arm. "Whew, it's heavy," she observed, adding in slightly scandalized tones, "Never been microfilmed." She smiled nervously and looked them up and down. "Going to a party?" she asked.

Theodor's scarlet cloak and Celeste's green culottes and silver jacket justified the question, but they shook their heads.

"Just the normally flamboyant garb of the family," Celeste said, while Theodor explained, "As it happens, we're bound on business connected with the disappearance. We Wolvers practically constitute a sub-committee of the Congress for the Discovery of New Purposes. And since a lot of varied material comes to our attention, we're going to see if any of it correlates with this bit of astronomical sleight-of-hand."

Madge nodded. "Give you something to do, at any rate. Well, I must be off. The Buddhist temple has lent us their place for a meeting." She gave them a woeful grin. "See you when the Earth jumps."

Theodor said to Celeste, "Come on, dear. We'll be late."

But Celeste didn't want to move too fast. "You know, Teddy," she said uncomfortably, "all this reminds me of those old myths where too much good fortune is a sure sign of coming disaster. It was just too much luck, our great-grandparents missing World III and getting the World Government started a thousand years ahead of schedule. Luck like that couldn't last, evidently. Maybe we've gone too fast with a lot of things, like space-flight and the Deep Shaft and—" she hesitated a bit—"complex marriages. I'm a woman. I want complete security. Where am I to find it?"

"In me," Theodor said promptly.

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"In you?" Celeste questioned, walking slowly. "But you're just one-third of my husband. Perhaps I should look for it in Edmund or Ivan."

"You angry with me about something?"

"Of course not. But a woman wants her source of security whole. In a crisis like this, it's disturbing to have it divided."

"Well, we are a whole and, I believe, indivisible family," Theodor told her warmly. "You're not suggesting, are you, that we're going to be punished for our polygamous sins by a cosmic catastrophe? Fire from heaven and all that?"

"Don't be silly. I just wanted to give you a picture of my feeling." Celeste smiled. "I guess none of us realized how much we've come to depend on the idea of unchanging scientific law. Knocks the props from under you."

Theodor nodded emphatically. "All the more reason to get a line on what's happening as quickly as possible. You know, it's fantastically far-fetched, but I think the experience of persons with Extra-Sensory Perception may give us a clue. During the past three or four days there's been a remarkable similarity in the dreams of ESPs all over the planet. I'm going to present the evidence at the meeting."

Celeste looked up at him. "So that's why Rosalind's bringing Frieda's daughter?"

"Dotty is your daughter, too, and Rosalind's," Theodor reminded her.

"No, just Frieda's," Celeste said bitterly. "Of course you may be the father. One-third of a chance."

Theodor looked at her sharply, but didn't comment. "Anyway, Dotty will be there," he said. "Probably asleep by now. All the ESPs have suddenly seemed to need more sleep."

As they talked, it had been growing darker, though the luminescence of the path kept it from being bothersome. And now the cloud rack parted to the east, showing a single red planet low on the horizon.

"Did you know," Theodor said suddenly, "that in *Gulliver's Travels* Dean Swift predicted that better telescopes would show Mars to have two moons? He got the sizes and distances and periods damned accurately, too. One of the few really startling coincidences of reality and literature."

"Stop being eerie," Celeste said sharply. But then she went on, "Those names Phobos and Deimos — they're Greek, aren't they? What do they mean?"

Theodor lost a step. "Fear and Terror," he said unwillingly.

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"Now don't go taking that for an omen. Most of the mythological names of major and minor ancient gods had been taken—the bodies in the Solar System are named that way, of course—and these were about all that were available."

It was true, but it didn't comfort him much.

I AM a God, Dotty was dreaming, *and I want to be by myself and think. I and my god-friends like to keep some of our thoughts secret, but the other gods have forbidden us to.*

A little smile flickered across the lips of the sleeping girl, and the woman in gold tights and gold-spangled jacket leaned forward thoughtfully. In her dignity and simplicity and straight-spined grace, she was rather like a circus mother watching her sick child before she went out for the trapeze act.

I and my god-friends sail off in our great round silver boats, Dotty went on dreaming. *The other gods are angry and scared. They are frightened of the thoughts we may think in secret. They follow us to hunt us down. There are many more of them than of us.*

AS Celeste and Theodor entered the committee room, Rosalind Wolver—a glitter of platinum against darkness—came in through the opposite door and softly shut it behind her. Frieda, a fair woman in blue robes, got up from the round table.

Celeste turned away with outward casualness as Theodor kissed his two other wives. She was pleased to note that Edmund seemed impatient too. A figure in close-fitting black, unrelieved except for two red arrows at the collar, he struck her as embodying very properly the serious, fateful temper of the moment.

He took two briefcases from his vest pocket and tossed them down on the table beside one of the microfilm projectors.

"I suggest we get started without waiting for Ivan," he said.

Frieda frowned anxiously. "It's ten minutes since he phoned from the Deep Space Bar to say he was starting right away. And that's hardly two minutes walk."

Rosalind instantly started toward the outside door.

"I'll check," she explained. "Oh, Frieda, I've set the mike so you'll hear if Dotty calls."

Edmund threw up his hands. "Very well, then," he said and walked over, switched on the picture and stared out moodily.

Theodor and Frieda got out their briefcases, switched on projectors, and began silently checking through their material.

Celeste fiddled with the TV

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and got a newscast. But she found her eyes didn't want to absorb the blocks of print that rather swiftly succeeded each other, so, after a few moments, she shrugged impatiently and switched to audio.

At the noise, the others looked around at her with surprise and some irritation, but in a few moments they were also listening.

"The two rocket ships sent out from Mars Base to explore the orbital positions of Phobos and Deimos—that is, the volume of space they'd be occuping if their positions had remained normal—report finding masses of dust and larger debris. The two masses of fine debris are moving in the same orbits and at the same velocities as the two vanished moons, and occupy roughly the same volumes of space, though the mass of material is hardly a hundredth that of the moons. Physicists have ventured no statements as to whether this constitutes a confirmation of the Disintegration Hypothesis.

"However, we're mighty pleased at this news here. There's a marked lessening of tension. The finding of the debris—solid, tangible stuff—seems to lift the whole affair out of the supernatural miasma in which some of us have been tempted to plunge it. One hundredth of the moons has been found. The rest will also be!"

Edmund had turned his back on the window. Frieda and Theodor had switched off their projectors.

"Meanwhile, Earthlings are going about their business with a minimum of commotion, meeting with considerable calm the strange threat to the fabric of their Solar System. Many, of course, are assembled in churches and humanist temples. Kometevskyites have staged helicopter processions at Washington, Peking, Pretoria, and Christiana, demanding that instant preparations be made for—and I quote—'Earth's coming leap through space.' They have also formally challenged all astronomers to produce an explanation other than the one contained in that strange book so recently conjured from oblivion, *The Dance of the Planets.*

"That about winds up the story for the present. There are no new reports from Interplanetary Radar, Astronomy, or the other rocket ships searching in the extended Mars volume. Nor have any statements been issued by the various groups working on the problem in Astrophysics, Cosmic Ecology, the Congress for the Discovery of New Purposes, and so forth. Meanwhile, however, we can take courage from the words of a poem written even before Dr.

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Kometevsky's book:

"This Earth is not the steadfast place
We landsmen build upon;
From deep to deep she varies pace,
And while she comes is gone.
Beneath my feet I feel
Her smooth bulk heave and dip;
With velvet plunge and soft upreel
She swings and steadies to her keel
Like a gallant, gallant ship."

WHILE the TV voice intoned the poem, growing richer as emotion caught it up, Celeste looked around her at the others. Frieda, with her touch of feminine helplessness showing more than ever through her business-like poise. Theodor leaning forward from his scarlet cloak thrown back, smiling the half-smile with which he seemed to face even the unknown. Black Edmund, masking a deep uncertainty with a strong show of decisiveness.

In short, her family. She knew their every quirk and foible. And yet now they seemed to her a million miles away, figures seen through the wrong end of a telescope.

Were they really a family? Strong sources of mutual strength and security to each other? Or had they merely been playing family, experimenting with their notions of complex marriage like a bunch of silly adolescents? Butterflies taking advantage of good weather to wing together in a glamorous, artificial dance—until outraged Nature decided to wipe them out?

As the poem was ending, Celeste saw the door open and Rosalind come slowly in. The Golden Woman's face was white as the paths she had been treading.

Just then the TV voice quickened with shock. "News! Lunar Observatory One reports that, although Jupiter is just about to pass behind the Sun, a good coronagraph of the planet has been obtained. Checked and rechecked, it admits of only one interpretation, which Lunar One feels duty-bound to release. *Jupiter's fourteen moons are no longer visible!*"

The chorus of remarks with which the Wolvers would otherwise have received this was checked by one thing: the fact that Rosalind seemed not to hear it. Whatever was on her mind prevented even that incredible statement from penetrating.

She walked shakily to the table and put down a briefcase, one end of which was smudged with dirt.

Without looking at them, she said, "Ivan left the Deep Space Bar twenty minutes ago, so he was coming straight here. On my way back I searched the earth. Midway I found this half-buried in the dirt. I had to tug to get it out—almost as if it had been cemented into the ground. Do you

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feel how the dirt seems to be *in* the leather, as if it had lain for years in the grave?"

By now the others were fingering the small case of microfilms they had seen so many times in Ivan's competent hands. What Rosalind said was true. It had a gritty, unwholesome feel to it. Also, it felt strangely heavy.

"And see what's written on it," she added.

They turned it over. Scrawled with white pencil in big, hasty, frantic letters were two words:

"Going down!"

The other gods, Dotty dreamt, *are combing the whole Universe for us. We have escaped them many times, but now our tricks are almost used up. There are no doors going out of the Universe and our boats are silver beacons to the hunters. So we decide to disguise them in the only way they can be disguised. It is our last chance.*

EDMUND rapped the table to gain the family's attention.

"I'd say we've done everything we can for the moment to find Ivan. We've made a thorough local search. A wider one, which we can't conduct personally, is in progress. All helpful agencies have been alerted and descriptions are being broadcast. I suggest we get on with the business of the evening—which may very well be connected with Ivan's disappearance."

One by one the others nodded and took their places at the round table. Celeste made a great effort to throw off the feeling of unreality that had engulfed her and focus attention on her microfilms.

"I'll take over Ivan's notes," she heard Edmund say. "They're mainly about the Deep Shaft."

"How far have they got with that?" Frieda asked idly. "Twenty-five miles?"

"Nearer thirty, I believe," Edmund answered, "and still going down."

At those last two words they all looked up quickly. Then their eyes went toward Ivan's briefcase.

Our trick has succeeded, Dotty dreamt. *The other gods have passed our hiding place a dozen times without noticing. They search the Universe for us many times in vain. They finally decide that we have found a door going out of the Universe. Yet they fear us all the more. They think of us as devils who will some day return through the door to destroy them. So they watch everywhere. We lie quietly smiling in our camouflaged boats, yet hardly daring to move or think, for fear that the faintest echoes of our doings will give them a*

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clue. Hundreds of millions of years pass by. They seem to us no more than drugged hours in a prison.

Theodor rubbed his eyes and pushed his chair back from the table. "We need a break."

Frieda agreed wearily. "We've gone through everything."

"Good idea," Edmund said briskly. "I think we've hit on several crucial points along the way and half disentangled them from the great mass of inconsequential material. I'll finish up that part of the job right now and present my case when we're all a bit fresher. Say half an hour?"

Theodor nodded heavily, pushing up from his chair and hitching his cloak over a shoulder.

"I'm going out for a drink," he informed them.

After several hesitant seconds, Rosalind quietly followed him. Frieda stretched out on a couch and closed her eyes. Edmund scanned microfilms tirelessly, every now and then setting one aside.

Celeste watched him for a minute, then sprang up and started toward the room where Dotty was asleep. But midway she stopped.

Not my child, she thought bitterly. *Frieda's her mother, Rosalind her nurse. I'm nothing at all. Just one of the husband's girl friends. A lady of uneasy virtue in a dissolving world.*

But then she straightened her shoulders and went on.

ROSALIND didn't catch up with Theodor. Her footsteps were silent and he never looked back along the path whose feeble white glow rose only knee-high, lighting a low strip of shrub and mossy treetrunk to either side, no more.

It was a little chilly. She drew on her gloves, but she didn't hurry. In fact, she fell farther and farther behind the dipping tail of his scarlet cloak and his plodding red shoes, which seemed to move disembodied, like those in the fairy tale.

When she reached the point where she had found Ivan's briefcase, she stopped altogether.

A breeze rustled the leaves, and, moistly brushing her cheek, brought forest scents of rot and mold. After a bit she began to hear the furtive scurryings and scuttlings of forest creatures.

She looked around her half-heartedly, suddenly realizing the futility of her quest. What clues could she hope to find in this knee-high twilight? And they'd thoroughly combed the place earlier in the night.

Without warning, an eerie tingling went through her and she

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was seized by a horror of the cold, grainy Earth underfoot — an ancestral terror from the days when men shivered at ghost stories about graves and tombs.

A tiny detail persisted in bulking larger and larger in her mind — the unnaturalness of the way the Earth had impregnated the corner of Ivan's briefcase, almost as if dirt and leather co-existed in the same space. She remembered the queer way the partly buried briefcase had resisted her first tug, like a rooted plant.

She felt cowed by the mysterious night about her, and literally dwarfed, as if she had grown several inches shorter. She roused herself and started forward.

Something held her feet.

They were ankle-deep in the path. While she looked in fright and horror, they began to sink still lower into the ground.

She plunged frantically, trying to jerk loose. She couldn't. She had the panicky feeling that the Earth had not only trapped but invaded her; that its molecules were creeping up between the molecules of her flesh; that the two were becoming one.

And she was sinking faster. Now knee-deep, thigh-deep, hip-deep, waist-deep. She beat at the powdery path with her hands and threw her body from side to side in agonized frenzy like some sinner frozen in the ice of the innermost circle of the ancients' hell. And always the sense of the dark, grainy tide rose inside as well as around her.

She thought, *he'd just have had time to scribble that note on his briefcase and toss it away.* She jerked off a glove, leaned out as

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far as she could, and made a frantic effort to drive its fingers into the powdery path. Then the Earth mounted to her chin, her nose, and covered her eyes.

She expected blackness, but it was as if the light of the path stayed with her, making a little glow all around. She saw roots, pebbles, black rot, worn tunnels, worms. Tier on tier of them, her vision penetrating the solid ground. And at the same time, the knowledge that these same sorts of things were coursing up through her.

AND still she continued to sink at a speed that increased, as if the law of gravitation applied to her in a diminished way. She dropped from black soil through gray clay and into pale limestone.

Her tortured, rock-permeated lungs sucked at rock and drew in air. She wondered madly if a volume of air were falling with her through the stone.

A glitter of quartz. The momentary openness of a foot-high cavern with a trickle of water. And then she was sliding down a black basalt column, half inside it, half inside gold-flecked ore. Then just black basalt. And always faster.

It grew hot, then hotter, as if she were approaching the mythical eternal fires.

AT first glance Theodor thought the Deep Space Bar was empty. Then he saw a figure hunched monkeylike on the last stool, almost lost in the blue shadows, while behind the bar, her crystal dress blending with the tiers of sparkling glasses, stood a grave-eyed young girl who could hardly have been fifteen.

The TV was saying, ". . . in addition, a number of mysterious disappearances of high-rating individuals have been reported. These are thought to be cases of misunderstanding, illusory apprehension, and impulse traveling—a result of the unusual stresses of the time. Finally, a few suggestible individuals in various parts of the globe, especially the Indian Peninsula, have declared themselves to be 'gods' and in some way responsible for current events.

"It is thought—"

The girl switched off the TV and took Theodor's order, explaining casually, "Joe wanted to go to a Kometevskyite meeting, so I took over for him." When she had prepared Theodor's highball, she announced, "I'll have a drink with you gentlemen," and squeezed herself a glass of pomegranite juice.

The monkeylike figure muttered, "Scotch-and-soda," then turned toward Edmund and

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asked, "And what is your reaction to all this, sir?"

THEODOR recognized the shrunken wrinkle-seamed face. It was Colonel Fortescue, a military antique long retired from the Peace Patrol and reputed to have seen actual fighting in the Last Age of Madness. Now, for some reason, the face sported a knowing smile.

Theodor shrugged. Just then the TV "big news" light blinked blue and the girl switched on audio. The Colonel winked at Theodor.

". . . confirming the disappearance of Jupiter's moons. But two other utterly fantastic reports have just been received. First, Lunar Observatory One says that it is visually tracking fourteen small bodies which it believes may be the lost moons of Jupiter. They are moving outward from the Solar System at an incredible velocity and are already beyond the orbit of Saturn!"

The Colonel said, "Ah!"

"Second, Palomar reports a large number of dark bodies approaching the Solar System at an equally incredible velocity. They are at about twice the distance of Pluto, but closing in fast! We will be on the air with further details as soon as possible."

The Colonel said, "Ah-ha!"

Theodor stared at him. The old man's self-satisfied poise was almost amusing.

"Are you a Kometevskyite?" Theodor asked him.

The Colonel laughed. "Of course not, my boy. Those poor people are fumbling in the dark. Don't you see what's happened?"

"Frankly, no."

The Colonel leaned toward Theodor and whispered gruffly, "The Divine Plan. God is a military strategist, naturally."

Then he lifted the scotch-and-soda in his clawlike hand and took a satisfying swallow.

"I knew it all along, of course," he went on musingly, "but this last news makes it as plain as a rocket blast, at least to anyone who knows military strategy. Look here, my boy, suppose you were commanding a fleet and got wind of the enemy's approach—what would you do? Why, you'd send your scouts and destroyers fanning out toward them. Behind that screen you'd mass your heavy ships. Then—"

"You don't mean to imply—" Theodor interrupted.

The girl behind the bar looked at them both cryptically.

"Of course I do!" the Colonel cut in sharply. "It's a war between the forces of good and evil. The bright suns and planets are on one side, the dark on the other.

The moons are the destroy-

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ers, Jupiter and Saturn are the big battleships, while we're on a heavy cruiser, I'm proud to say. We'll probably go into action soon. Be a corking fight, what? And all by divine strategy!"

He chuckled and took another big drink. Theodor looked at him sourly. The girl behind the bar polished a glass and said nothing.

DOTTY suddenly began to turn and toss, and a look of terror came over her sleeping face. Celeste leaned forward apprehensively.

The child's lips worked and Celeste made out the sleepy-fuzzy words: "They've found out where we're hiding. They're coming to get us. No! Please, no!"

Celeste's reactions were mixed. She felt worried about Dotty and at the same time almost in terror of her, as if the little girl were an agent of supernatural forces. She told herself that this fear was an expression of her own hostility, yet she didn't really believe it. She touched the child's hand.

Dotty's eyes opened without making Celeste feel she had quite come awake. After a bit she looked at Celeste and her little lips parted in a smile.

"Hello," she said sleepily. "I've been having such funny dreams." Then, after a pause, frowning, "I really am a god, you know. It feels very queer."

"Yes, dear?" Celeste prompted uneasily. "Shall I call Frieda?"

The smile left Dotty's lips. "Why do you act so nervous around me?" she asked. "Don't you love me, Mummy?"

Celeste started at the word. Her throat closed. Then, very slowly, her face broke into a radiant smile. "Of course I do, darling. I love you very much."

Dotty nodded happily, her eyes already closed again.

There was a sudden flurry of excited voices beyond the door. Celeste heard her name called. She stood up.

"I'm going to have to go out and talk with the others," she said. "If you want me, dear, just call."

"Yes, Mummy."

EDMUND rapped for attention. Celeste, Frieda, and Theodor glanced around at him. He looked more frightfully strained, they realized, than even they felt. His expression was a study in suppressed excitement, but there were also signs of a knowledge that was almost too overpowering for a human being to bear.

His voice was clipped, rapid. "I think it's about time we stopped worrying about our own affairs and thought of those of the Solar System, partly because

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I think they have a direct bearing on the disappearances of Ivan and Rosalind. As I told you, I've been sorting out the crucial items from the material we've been presenting. There are roughly four of those items, as I see it. It's rather like a mystery story. I wonder if, hearing those four clues, you will come to the same conclusion I have."

The others nodded.

"First, there are the latest reports from Deep Shaft, which, as you know, has been sunk to investigate deep-Earth conditions. At approximately twenty-nine miles below the surface, the delvers have encountered a metallic obstruction which they have tentatively named the durasphere. It resists their hardest drills, their strongest corrosives. They have extended a side-tunnel at that level for a quarter of a mile. Delicate measurements, made possible by the mirror-smooth metal surface, show that the durasphere has a slight curvature that is almost exactly equal to the curvature of the Earth itself. The suggestion is that deep borings made anywhere in the world would encounter the durasphere at the same depth.

"Second, the movements of the moons of Mars and Jupiter, and particularly the debris left behind by the moons of Mars. Granting Phobos and Deimos had duraspheres proportional in size to that of Earth, then the debris would roughly equal in amount the material in those two duraspheres' rocky envelopes. The suggestion is that the two duraspheres suddenly burst from their envelopes with such itanic velocity as to leave those disrupted envelopes behind."

It was deadly quiet in the committee room.

"Thirdly, the disappearances of Ivan and Rosalind, and especially the baffling hint — from Ivan's message in one case and Rosalind's downward-pointing glove in the other—that they were both somehow drawn into the depths of the Earth.

"Finally, the dreams of the ESPs, which agree overwhelmingly in the following points: A group of beings separate themselves from a godlike and telepathic race because they insist on maintaining a degree of mental privacy. They flee in great boats or ships of some sort. They are pursued on such a scale that there is no hiding place for them anywhere in the universe. In some manner they successfully camouflage their ships. Eons pass and their still-fanatical pursuers do not penetrate their secret. Then, suddenly, they are detected."

Edmund waited. "Do you see what I'm driving at?" he asked hoarsely.

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HE could tell from their looks that the others did, but couldn't bring themselves to put it into words.

"I suppose it's the time-scale and the value-scale that are so hard for us to accept," he said softly. "Much more, even, than the size-scale. The thought that there are creatures in the Universe to whom the whole career of Man—in fact, the whole career of life—is no more than a few thousand or hundred thousand years. And to whom Man is no more than a minor stage property—a trifling part of a clever job of camouflage."

This time he went on, "Fantasy writers have at times hinted all sorts of odd things about the Earth—that it might even be a kind of single living creature, or honeycombed with inhabited caverns, and so on. But I don't know that any of them have ever suggested that the Earth, together with all the planets and moons of the Solar System, might be . . ."

In a whisper, Frieda finished for him, ". . . a camouflaged fleet of gigantic spherical spaceships."

"Your guess happens to be the precise truth."

At that familiar, yet dreadly unfamiliar voice, all four of them swung toward the inner door. Dotty was standing there, a sleep-stupefied little girl with a blanket caught up around her and dragging behind. Their own daughter. But in her eyes was a look from which they cringed.

She said, "I am a creature somewhat older than what your geologists call the Archeozoic Era. I am speaking to you through a number of telepathically sensitive individuals among your kind. In each case my thoughts suit themselves to your level of comprehension. I inhabit the disguised and jetless spaceship which is your Earth."

Celeste swayed a step forward. "Baby . . ." she implored.

Dotty went on, without giving her a glance, "It is true that we planted the seeds of life on some of these planets simply as part of our camouflage, just as we gave them a suitable environment for each. And it is true that now we must let most of that life be destroyed. Our hiding place has been discovered, our pursuers are upon us, and we must make one last effort to escape or do battle, since we firmly believe that the principle of mental privacy to which we have devoted our existence is perhaps the greatest good in the whole Universe.

"But it is not true that we look with contempt upon you. Our whole race is deeply devoted to life, wherever it may come into being, and it is our rule never to interfere with its development.

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That was one of the reasons we made life a part of our camouflage—it would make our pursuers reluctant to examine these planets too closely.

"Yes, we have always cherished you and watched your evolution with interest from our hidden lairs. We may even unconsciously have shaped your development in certain ways, trying constantly to educate you away from war and finally succeeding—which may have given the betraying clue to our pursuers.

"Your planets must be burst asunder—this particular planet in the area of the Pacific—so that we may have our last chance to escape. Even if we did not move, our pursuers would destroy you with us. We cannot invite you inside our ships—not for lack of space, but because you could never survive the vast accelerations to which you would be subjected. You would, you see, need very special accommodations, of which we have enough only for a few.

"Those few we will take with us, as the seed from which a new human race may—if we ourselves somehow survive—be born."

ROSALIND and Ivan stared dumbly at each other across the egg-shaped silver room, without apparent entrance or exit, in which they were sprawled. But their thoughts were no longer of thirty-odd mile journeys down through solid earth, or of how cool it was after the heat of the passage, or of how grotesque it was to be trapped here, the fragment of a marriage. They were both listening to the voice that spoke inside their minds.

"In a few minutes your bodies will be separated into layers one atom thick, capable of being shelved or stored in such a way as to endure almost infinite accelerations. Single cells will cover acres of space. But do not be alarmed. The process will be painless and each particle will be catalogued for future assembly. Your consciousness will endure throughout the process."

Celeste looked at her gold-shod toes. She was wondering, *will they go first, or my head? Or will I be peeled like an apple?*

She looked at Ivan and knew he was thinking the same thing.

UP in the committee room, the other Wolvers slumped around the table. Only little Dotty sat straight and staring, speechless and unanswering, quite beyond their reach, like a telephone off the hook and with the connection open, but no voice from the other end.

They had just switched off the TV after listening to a confused medley of denials, prayers, Kom-

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etevskyite chatterings, and a few astonishingly realistic comments on the possibility of survival.

These last pointed out that, on the side of the Earth opposite the Pacific, the convulsions would come slowly when the entombed spaceship burst forth—provided, as seemed the case, that it moved without jets or reaction.

It would be as if the Earth's vast core simply vanished. Gravity would diminish abruptly to a fraction of its former value. The empty envelope of rock and water and air would slowly fall together, though at the same time the air would begin to escape from the debris because there would no longer be the mass required to hold it.

However, there might be definite chances of temporary and even prolonged survival for individuals in strong, hermetically sealed structures, such as submarines and spaceships. The few spaceships on Earth were reported to have blasted off, or be preparing to leave, with as many passengers as could be carried.

But most persons, apparently, could not contemplate action of any sort. They could only sit and think, like the Wolvers.

A faint smile relaxed Celeste's face. She was thinking, *how beautiful! It means the death of the Solar System, which is a horrifying subjective concept. Objectively, though, it would be a more awesome sight than any human being has ever seen or ever could see. It's an absurd and even brutal thing to wish—but I wish I could see the whole cataclysm from beginning to end. It would make death seem very small, a tiny personal event.*

Dotty's face was losing its blank expression, becoming intent and alarmed.

"We are in contact with our pursuers," she said in the familiar-unfamiliar voice. "Negotiations are now going on. There seems to be—there *is* a change in them. Where they were harsh and vindictive before, they now are gentle and conciliatory." She paused, the alarm on her childish features pinching into anxious uncertainty. "Our pursuers have always been shrewd. The change in them may be false, intended merely to lull us into allowing them to come close enough to destroy us. We must not fall into the trap by growing hopeful . . ."

They leaned forward, clutching hands, watching the little face as though it were a television screen. Celeste had the wild feeling that she was listening to a communique from a war so unthinkably vast and violent, between opponents so astronomically huge and nearly immortal, that she felt like no more than a reasoning ameba . . . and then realized with

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an explosive urge to laugh that that was exactly the situation.

"No!" said Dotty. Her eyes began to glow. "They *have* changed! During the eons in which we lay sealed away and hidden from them, knowing nothing of them, they have rebelled against the tyranny of a communal mind to which no thoughts are private . . . the tyranny that we ourselves fled to escape. They come not to destroy us, but to welcome us back to a society that we and they can make truly great!"

FRIEDA collapsed to a chair, trembling between laughter and hysterical weeping. Theodor looked as blank as Dotty had while waiting for words to speak. Edmund sprang to the picture window, Celeste toward the TV set.

Climbing shakily out of the chair, Frieda stumbled to the picture window and peered out beside Edmund. She saw lights bobbing along the paths with a wild excitement.

On the TV screen, Celeste watched two brightly lit ships spinning in the sky — whether human spaceships or Phobos and Deimos come to help Earth rejoice, she couldn't tell.

Dotty spoke again, the joy in her strange voice forcing them to turn. "And you, dear children, creatures of our camouflage, we welcome you—whatever your future career on these planets or like ones—into the society of enlightened worlds! You need not feel small and alone and helpless ever again, for we shall always be with you!"

The outer door opened. Ivan and Rosalind reeled in, drunkenly smiling, arm in arm.

"Like rockets," Rosalind blurted happily. "We came through the durasphere and solid rock . . . shot up right to the surface."

"They didn't have to take us along," Ivan added with a bleary grin. "But you know that already, don't you? They're too good to let you live in fear, so they must have told you by now."

"Yes, we know," said Theodor. "They must be almost godlike in their goodness. I feel . . . calm."

Edmund nodded soberly. "Calmer than I ever felt before. It's knowing, I suppose, that—well, we're not alone."

Dotty blinked and looked around and smiled at them all with a wholly little-girl smile.

"Oh, Mummy," she said, and it was impossible to tell whether she spoke to Frieda or Rosalind or Celeste, "I've just had the funniest dream."

"No, darling," said Rosalind gently, "it's we who had the dream. We've just awakened."

—FRITZ LIEBER

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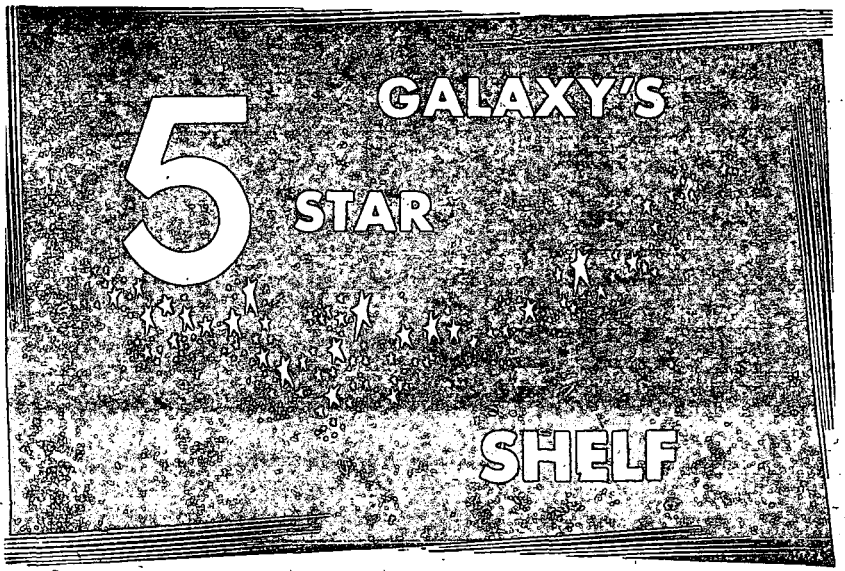

THE PUPPET MASTERS, by Robert A. Heinlein. Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1951. 219 *pages,* $2.75
BETWEEN PLANETS, by Robert A. Heinlein. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1951. 222 *pages,* $2.50

WITHIN these two books can be found nearly the whole spread of the complex Heinlein character — the hard-boiled, almost Huxleyan sophisticate, the somberly mature player with ideas in *The Puppet Masters* (serialized last fall in GALAXY) and the hard, muscular, action writer for the teen-age crowd who gives them wonderfully adventurous concepts of a future life in space.

The Puppet Masters, with its chilling concept of the alien invader in the form of a parasite that gloms onto one's shoulders and thereby converts one into merely another molecule in the mass-society of the encroaching slugs, is a fascinatingly repulsive job. Since it appeared here, to

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say more would be immodest.

In *Between Planets,* a violent tale of the revolt of the Venus and Mars colonies against the deadening bureaucracy of Earth, we have a magnificently real and vivid Picture of the Possible, even including the charmingly intellectual crocodiles Heinlein picks as the dominant life-form of Venus.

The hero is a very real teen-age boy who had been born in space and was thus a "citizen of the world" and a "displaced person" when war broke out.

Without question, the tale will appeal to adult Science Fiction readers as well as to their sons—and daughters.

LODESTAR, by Franklyn Branley. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1951. 248 *pages,* $2.50

THIS juvenile suffers from the fact that its author is a high school science teacher who too often tries to put over a bit of knowledge or information along with the adventure. The story tells of the first rocket trip to Mars, and technically has much of interest in it. Branley has paid attention to a lot of the minutiae of space travel that more careless writers either do not know or take as matters of course.

The distressing result is that the characterizations are painfully amateur and the plot entirely so, while the science and the imagination exposed in the book are generally first-rate. It is the awkward and often patronizing writing down to youth that is a little difficult to stomach. It's surprising — Mr. Branley's own students must have shown him how alert kids are today.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, 1951. *Edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. Frederick Fell, Inc., New York,* 1951. 352 *pages,* $2.95

THIRD in the Fell series of annual winnowings of the science fiction crop, this attractive volume contains 18 stories, of which 12 rate as "B" or better on my grading scale. This is a very high average for contemporary science fiction anthologies.

The book has a long introduction, in which we are indoctrinated with the concept of science fiction as ethnography. Well, maybe.

The stories I mark as follows: "A"—Bill Brown's "Star Ducks" (delightful!), Roger Young's "Not to be Opened," Katherine MacLean's "Contagion," Alfred Bester's lovely "Oddy and Id," Damon Knight's "To Serve Man" (which *everybody* Loves!), Dick Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman," Ray Bradbury's "The

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Fox in the Forest" (what a terrific story!), Fredric Brown's "The Last Martian," and, last but not least, the outstanding science fiction story of 1951, Fritz Leiber's "Coming Attraction," which, of course, created a row when it was in GALAXY.

"B" stories—R. Bretnor's "The Gnurrs Come from the Voodvork Out" (which really isn't science fiction at all, Cyril Kornbluth's "The Mindworm" (which would have been "A" if only there wasn't already a story called "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes", Leiber, 1949), and William Temple's "Forget Me Not," great in concept, but pointless in that it literally goes nowhere.

The other six tales are not worth mentioning, so I won't mention them.

FOUNDATION, by Isaac Asimov. Gnome Press, New York, 1951. 255 *pages,* $2.75

THIS, Asimov's fourth book in two years, is obviously the first volume of several which will tell the history of the whole period between the First and Second Galactic Empires, and how the Centuries of the Dark Ages were reduced from a postulated three hundred to less than ten through the workings of Hari Seldon's Foundation for Psychohistory.

This first volume carries the story from the start of the Foundation, with a selection from the memoirs of Gaal Dornick, Seldon's biographer, clear through to the episode of Hober Mallow, first of the galactic Merchant Princes. In between, there is the magnificent career of Salvor Hardin, Politician, in two stories; and the relatively undistinguished tale of Limnar Ponyets, Trader and predecessor of the Merchant Princes.

Asimov has obviously studied the trends and trajectories of past human history, and has transposed them with sometimes unnecessary literalness to the enormous scale of a Galactic civilization. From the priest-preservers of the remnants of an ancient culture to the merchantile sea captains opening up the China Sea and the first great capitalists of the Venetian era, the trends of our own world's history are mirrored in this book on a vastly magnified scale.

Woven throughout is a strand of belief by the author that, tomorrow, psychological sciences will have advanced to a point where they can prophesy—and to some degree control—the future movements of humanity as a whole.

The result is a book of real intellectual entertainment and adventure.

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WHO GOES THERE? by John Campbell, Jr. Shasta Publishers, Chicago, 2nd Ed., 1951. 231 *pages,* $3.00

THIS is a reissue of a collection of Campbell's short stories, first published in 1948, to take advantage of the publicity surrounding the movie *The Thing,* which theoretically was based on the title story of this collection. The connection between the two is not excessively close.

It is a pleasure to have the group of seven Campbell shorts on hand again. Every one of them is definitely worth having in your permanent library.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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NOVELET
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fresh air fiend

By KRIS NEVILLE

Sick and helpless, he was very lucky to have a faithful native woman to nurse him. Or was he?

HE rolled over to look at the plants. They were crinkled and dead and useless in the narrow flower box across the hut. He tried to draw his arm under his body to force himself erect. The reserve oxygen began to hiss in sleepily. He tried to signal Hertha to help him, but she was across the room with her back to him, her hands fumbling with a bowl of dark, syrupy medicine. His lips moved, but the words died in his throat.

He wanted to explain to her that scientists in huge laboratories with many helpers and millions of dollars had been unable to find

Illustrated by KARL ROGERS

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a cure for liguna fever. He wanted to explain that no brown liquid, made like cake batter, would cure the disease that had decimated the crews of two expeditions to Sitari and somehow gotten back to cut down the population of Wiblanihaven.

But, watching her, he could understand what she thought she was doing. At one time she must have seen a pharmacist put chemicals into a mortar and grind them with a pestle. This, she must have remembered, was what people did to make medicine, and now she put what chemical-appearing substances she could locate—flour, powdered coffee, lemon extract, salt—into a bowl and mashed them together. She was very intent on her work and it probably made her feel almost helpful.

Finally she moved out of his field of vision; he found that he could not turn his head to follow her with his eyes. He lay conscious but inert, like waterlogged wood on a river bottom. He heard sounds of her movement. At last he slept.

HE awakened with a start. His head was clearer than it had been for hours. He listened to the oxygen hissing in again. He tried to read the dial on the far wall, but it blurred before his eyes.

"Hertha," he said.

She came quickly to his cot.

"What does the oxygen register say?"

"Oxygen register?"

He gritted his teeth against the fever which began to shake his body mercilessly until he wanted to scream to make it stop. He became angry even as the fever shook him: angry not really at the doctors; not really at any one thing. Angry because the mountains did not care if he saw them; angry that the air did not care if he breathed it. Angry because, between planets, between suns, the coldness of space merely waited, not giving a damn.

Several years ago—ten, twenty, perhaps more—some doctor had finally isolated a strain of the filterable virus of liguna fever that could be used as a vaccine: too weak to kill, but strong enough to produce immunity against its more virulent brother strains. That opened up the Sitari System for colonization and exploration and meant that the men who got there first would make fortunes.

So he went to the base at Ke, first selling his strip mine property and disposing of his tools and equipping his spaceship for the intersolar trip; and at Ke they shot him full of the disease. But his bloodstream built no antibodies. The weakened

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virus settled in his nervous system and there was no way of getting it out. The doctors were very sorry for him, and they assured him it was a one-in-ten-thousand phenomenon. Thereafter, he suffered recurrent paralytic attacks.

If it had not been for the advance warning—a pain at the base of his spine, a moment of violent trembling in his knees—he would have been forced to give up solitary strip mining altogether. As it was, whenever he felt the warning, he had to hurry to the nearest colony and be hospitalized for the duration of the attack. He had had four such warnings on this satellite, and three times he had gone to Pastiville on Helio and been cared for and come away with less money than he had gone with.

His bank credit, once large, had slowly dribbled away, and now he made just about enough from his mining to care for himself during illness. He could not afford to hunt for less dangerous, less isolated work. It would not pay enough, for he knew how to do very little that civilization needed done. He was finally trapped; no longer could he afford a pilot for the long flight from Helio to a newer frontier, and he could not risk the trip alone.

He lay waiting for the new spasm of fever and stared at Hertha who, this time, would care for him here and he would not need to go to a hospital. Perhaps, after a little while, he would be able to save enough to push on, through the awful indifference of space, to some new world where, with luck, there would be a sudden fortune.

Then he could go back to civilization.

He realized bitterly that he was merely telling himself he would go back. He knew there was only one direction he could go, and that direction was not back.

Hertha waited, hurt-eyed, moving her pudgy hands helplessly.

When the shaking subsided, he explained through chattering teeth about the oxygen register across the room, and she went away.

THE fever vanished completely, leaving him listless. His hand, lying on the rough blanket, was abnormally white. He wiggled the fingers, but he could not feel the wool.

His mouth was dry and he wanted a drink of water.

Hertha moved out of his range of vision. He shifted his head on the damp pillow and watched her out of the corner of his eye.

He had never heard her real name, but she did not seem to object to his name for her.

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I am that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man,
And the form of them bodily;
I am the soul.

He tried to sit up again, but he was very weak. He wanted to quote it to her and tell her what he had never told her: that the name of it was *Hertha* and that it had been written long ago by a man named Swinburne, and he wanted to explain why he had named her after a poem, because it was very funny.

The harsh light hurt his eyes and made him feel dizzy. He lay watching her as she bent toward the oxygen dial, wrinkling her face in animal concentration, trying to read it for him. Her puzzled expression was pathetic; it reminded him of the first time he had seen her.

The walls began to spin crazily, for the hut had been intended for only one person.

He remembered the first time he saw her, cowering in a filthy alleyway in the Miramus. At first he thought she had taken some food from a garbage pail and was trying to conceal it by holding it to her breast. But when the flare of a rocket leaving the field two blocks away lit the area for a moment, he saw that she was holding a tiny welikin, terribly mangled, looking as if it had just been run over by a heavy transport truck. He took it away from her and threw it into the darkness, shuddering.

"It was dead," he said.

She continued to stare at him, starting to cry silently, big, round, salt tears that she brushed at with reddened hands.

"My—my—" she stammered.

He had an eerie feeling that she was trying to say, "My baby," and he felt a little chill of pity creep up his spine.

"What do you do?" he asked kindly.

"Sweep floors. I work a little for the Commander's wife. Around her home."

"How did you get here?"

Still crying, she said, "On a rocket."

"Of course. What I meant was . . . ." But he did not need to ask how she had gotten passed the emigration officers. Some influential man—such things could happen, especially when the destination was a relatively new frontier, such as Helio, where there was little danger of investigation—had seen to it that certain answers were falsified; and a little money and a corrupt official had conspired to produce a passport which read, "Mentally and physically fit for colonization."

The influential man had, in effect, bought and paid for a personal slave to bring with him to

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the stars. She would not know of her legal rights. She would be easily frightened and confused. And then something had happened, and for some reason she had been abandoned to shift for herself. Perhaps she had run away.

He looked away from her face. This was none of his affair.

"Never mind," he said. He reached into his pocket and gave her a few coins and then turned and walked rapidly away, suddenly anxious to see the bright, remembered face of the young colonist, Doris, Don's friend; a face that would chase away the memory of this pathetic creature.

After a moment, he heard the pad of her feet hopefully, fearfully following him.

SHE was standing beside his cot again, and he concentrated to make the walls stop spinning.

"It had a blue line."

"Yes, I know. Where?"

She showed him with her fingers. "This much."

"Halfway up?" he prompted.

Dumbly, she nodded.

He looked at the plants. "Hertha, listen. I've got to talk before the paralysis comes back. You'll have to listen very carefully and try to understand. I'll be all right in about ten days. You know that?"

She nodded again.

He took a deep breath that seemed to catch in his throat. "But you'll have to go outside before then."

Hertha whimpered and fluttered her hands nervously.

"I know you're afraid," he said. "I wouldn't ask you, but it has to be done. I can't go. You can see that, can't you? It has to be done."

"Afraid!"

"Nonsense!" he said harshly. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Put on the outside suit and nothing can hurt you."

Moaning in fear, she shook her head.

"Listen, Hertha! You've *got* to do it. For *me!*" He did not like to make the appeal personal. He would have preferred to convince her that fear of the outside was groundless. It was not possible. He had attempted, again and again, to explain that the tiny satellite with its poison air was completely harmless as long as she wore a surface suit. There was no alien life, no possible danger, outside this tiny square of insulated hut and breathable air. But it was useless. And the personal appeal was the only course remaining. It was as much for her sake as his; she also needed oxygen, but she could never understand that fact.

"For you?" she asked.

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He nodded, feeling the fever rise. His face twisted in pain, and he stared pleadingly into her cow-like eyes: dumb eyes, animal eyes, brown and trusting and . . . loyal. The paralysis struck. His voice would not come up out of his chest and the dizziness swamped his mind, and, in fever, he was once again in Pastiville, the nearest planet with an oxygen atmosphere.

HERTHA followed him up the alley, out into the cheap glitter of Windopole Avenue, a rutted, smelly street which was the center of the port-workers' section. She followed him across Windopole, up Venus, across Nineshime. He turned into the Lexo Building, which had become shabby since he had seen it last, when it had been freshly painted. She did not follow him inside, and he breathed a sigh of relief and tried to put her out of his mind as he walked up the stairs to the room 17B.

After a moment's hesitation, his heart knocking with pleasant anticipation, he pressed the buzzer.

"Come in."

He found the knob, twisted open the door, entered.

"Why Jimmy!" the girl said in what seemed to be surprise and heavy delight. She crossed to him quickly and offered her lips to be kissed. "It's good to see you!"

He took half a step backward, trying to keep the shock out of his face.

"Oh, it's so good to see you, Jimmy! Sit down. Tell me all about it, about everything. Did you make loads and loads of money? When did you get back? How's the lig fever?"

He sat down, scarcely listening, studying the apartment, feeling vaguely ill. She was chattering, he realized, to overcome her embarrassment.

"The books you ordered came. I've got them right here. They're all there but some poetry or other. There was a letter about that, but the people just said they didn't have it in stock. I opened it to see if it required an answer. Just a sec. I'll get them for you." She left the room with quick, nervous strides.

The apartment had been redone since he had seen it. There were now expensive drapes at the windows, imported from somewhere; a genuine Earth tapestry hung above the door. Plump silken pillows scattered on the floor and a late model phono-general in the corner, with a gleaming cabinet and record spool accessory box.

She came back with the books, neatly done up in a bundle.

"I guess you still read as much as ever? Don said you always were a great reader."

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Uncomfortably, he stood up.

She put the books on a low serving table, moistened her lips to make them glistening red. "Sit *down*, Jimmy!"

He still stood.

"*Jimmy!*" she said in mock anger. "Sit down! Goodness, it's good to have a fellow Earthman to talk to. I was so busy when you came by the other time, we scarcely had a *minute* to talk. I'd just got here, you remember . . . Well, I'm settled now, so we'll just have to have a nice, long talk."

He shifted on his feet.

"I don't suppose you've heard from Don?" Her voice was strained, almost desperate. "Isn't it the oddest thing, him knowing you and me, and both of us right here?"

"He told me to write how you were getting along?"

". . . Oh."

He smiled without humor and felt like an old man. He wanted to explain how he had looked forward to seeing a person from his own planet again. Now he wanted to remind her of the girl he remembered: When she had just arrived, still unpacking, eager to start as a junior secretary for the League.

"Thank you for letting me send the books here," he said. The sickness was heavy in the pit of his stomach, and suddenly he was hard and bitter. He quoted softly:

> "The world forsaken,
> And out of mind
> Honor and labor,
> We shall not find
> The stars unkind."

"Old poetry? I guess you really do read a—" Then understanding made her eyes wince. "That wasn't intended to be very complimentary, was it, Jimmy?"

Her name was no longer Doris; it was any of a thousand, and her perfume, heavy in his nostrils, was not her perfume or any individual's. She was there before him; she was real! But along with her were a thousand names and a thousand scents. There was the painful nostalgia of recognizing a strange room.

Awkwardly he said, "I really must go. I'd like to have a long talk, but—"

Her lips parting in sudden artificiality, she crossed to him, reached for his hand with her own.

In his mind was the heavy futility of repeating the same thing senselessly until it lost all meaning.

"I apologize about the poem," he said, because he knew that it was not his place to speak of it.

"That's all right," she said with hollow cheerfulness. Her mouth jerked and her eyes darkened. "Please don't go yet."

The palms of his hands were

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moist. He looked around the apartment again, and he did not want to ask, to bring it out in cruel words. It was not the sort of thing one asked.

"I really must go," he repeated levelly.

She put her hands on his shoulders. "Please . . ."

And then he saw that she intended to bribe him in the only way she knew how, and he said, "Don't worry, I won't tell Don."

He saw relief on her face, and then he was out of the apartment, shaken. He felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach, and he was sickened and his hand trembled. He wanted to talk to someone and try to explain it.

Hertha was waiting when he came out to the street.

THE fever passed; control of his body returned.

"For you?" Hertha asked.

He half propped himself up on the cot. He waved his hand weakly. "Those dead plants. You must throw them out and bring in more."

He listened tensely, imagining that he could hear the precious oxygen hiss in from the emergency tank to freshen and revitalize the dead air. Halfway down on the dial. Not enough for ten days, even for one person, unless the air was replenished by bringing in plants.

"Hertha, we've got to purify this air. Now listen. Listen carefully, Hertha. You've seen me dig up those plants on the outside?"

"Yes, I watch when you go out. I always watch, Jimmy."

"Good. You've got to do the same thing. You've got to go out and dig up some plants. You've got to bring them in here and plant them the way I did. You know which ones they are?"

"Yes," she said.

He closed his eyes, trying to think of a way to make her see how vital a thing a tiny plant could be. The complex chemistry of it bubbled to the surface of his mind. He wanted to tell her why the plants died in the artificial human atmosphere and had to be replaced every week or so. He wanted to tell her, but he was growing weaker.

"They purify the air by releasing oxygen. You understand?"

She nodded her head dumbly.

"You must bring in a great many plants, Hertha. Remember that—a *great* many. Don't forget that. When you go outside, through the locks, we lose air. Air is very precious, so you must bring in a great many plants."

"Yes, Jimmy."

"And you must plant them as I did."

"Yes, Jimmy."

He began to talk faster, in a race with the growing fever.

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"I've gathered most of the oxygenating plants around the hut. So you may have to go into the forest to get enough."

"The—the forest?"

"You *must*, Hertha! You *must!*"

Her mouth twisted as if she were ready to cry. "For you. Yes, for you I will go into the forest."

The fever came back. His mind wandered away.

HE was walking in the open air. He walked from Nineshime to Venus, down Venus to Windopole, up Windopole to "The Grand Eagle and Barrel." He went in. Hertha came with him and sat down by his side at the bar.

The bartender looked at him oddly. "She with you, Mac?"

He turned to look at her; her dumb, brown eyes met his. He wanted to snarl: "Get the hell away! Leave me alone!" But he choked back the words. It was not Hertha he was angry with. She had done him no injury. She had merely followed him, perhaps because she knew of nothing else to do; perhaps because of temporary gratitude for the coins; perhaps in hope that he would buy her a drink. When the anger passed, he felt sorry for her again.

He said, "Want a drink?"

She shook her head without changing expression.

He looked at her and shrugged and thought that after a while she would get tired and go away. He ordered, and the bartender brought a bottle and one glass.

Hertha continued to stare at him; he tried to ignore her.

He drank. He thought it would get easier to ignore her as the level of the bottle fell. It didn't. He drank some more. It grew late.

"I gotta explain," he said, the liquor swirling in his mind.

She waited, cow-eyed.

"Ernest Dowson. Man's name. He wrote a poem—*Beata Solitudo*. I wanna explain this. Man lived long, long, long, long time ago. You listenin'? Okay. That's good. That's fine. He said—it's ver' importan' you should unnerstan' this—he said how you put honor and labor out of your mind when you . . . you're out here. What he meant, it's . . . it's . . . you see . . . Now I gotta make you see all this. So you listen real close while I tell it to you. There was a man named . . . ."

He wanted to explain how the frontier does things to people. He wanted to explain how society is a tight little box that keeps everything locked up and hidden, but how society breaks down and becomes fluid in the stars, and how people explode and forget what they learned in civilization, and how everything is unstable.

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"This man, his name's—" he said.

He wanted to explain how the harsh elements and brute nature and space, the God-awful emptiness and indifference and the sense of aloneness and selfishness and . . .

There were a thousand things he wanted to tell her. They were all the things he had thought about as he followed the frontier. If he could get it all down right, he could make her see why he had to follow the frontier as long as there was anything left inside of him.

Maybe the rest of the people out here were that way, too. Maybe he had seen it in Doris' eyes tonight. Maybe that was why society broke down in the stars and civilization came only when men and women like him were gone.

He did not want to know how the rest felt. He did not know whether it would be more terrifying to learn that he was alone, or that he was not alone.

But just for tonight, he could tell the alien creature beside him. It would be safe to tell her—if the idea had not rusted inside of him so long that there were no longer any words to fit it.

But first he had to make her see his home planet and the great cities and the landscaped valleys and the majestic mountains and the people. He had to make her see the vast sweep of the explorers who first carried the race to a million planets, who devised faster-than-light ships and metals to make the ships out of, metals to hold their forms in the crucible beyond normal space. He had to make her see the colonists who tied all the world together with spans of steel commerce and then moved on in ever-widening circles. He wanted to give her the whole picture.

Then he wanted to explain the surge, the restlessness of the men at the frontier. Different men, he thought; from the womb of civilization, but unlike their brothers. The men who pushed out and out. Searching, always searching. He was afraid to find out if their reasons were the same as his. For himself, he had seen a thousand planets and a thousand new life-forms. But it was not enough. There were the vast, blank, empty, indifferent reaches of space beyond him, and that was what drove him on.

This he wanted to say to Hertha: No matter how far you go, the thing that gets you is that there's nothing that cares; no matter how far, the thing is that nothing cares; the thing is that nothing cares. It gets you. And you have to go on because some day, somewhere, there may be—something.

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But he lost the trend of his thoughts completely, and he had another drink.

"Decent people come out here . . ."

What was he going to say about decent people?

"Stupid!" he cried, slapping her in the face.

She rubbed her cheek. "Stupid?"

He wanted to cry, for he had not known that he was brutal. "Can't you see?" he screamed, and it was necessary to explain it to her; and then it was not necessary. "You're like the awful, indifferent, mindless blackness of space, unreasoning!"

"Unreasoning," she repeated carefully.

"You're *Hertha!*"

"I'm Hertha," she said.

THE period of calmness that returned after the fever was crystal and lucid, preceding, he knew, a severe, prolonged seizure.

"I'm afraid," she told him, shivering, "but I will go."

He watched her get into the light surface suit, clamp down the helmet with trembling hands. He was shaking with nervousness as she hesitated at the lock. Then she pulled it open. It clicked behind her. He heard the brief hiss of the oxygen replacing the air that had whooshed out.

And he felt sorry for her, alone, terrified, on the scaly, hard surface of the tiny satellite. He closed his eyes, pictured her walking past his strip mine, past the gleaming heap of minerals ready for the transport.

He felt tears in his eyes and yet he could not entirely explain his feelings toward her—half fear, sometimes half affection. But more important than that: Why was she with him? What were her feelings? Had some sense of gratitude made her come? Affection?

He could not understand her. At times she seemed beyond all understanding. Her responses were mindless, almost mechanical, and that frightened him.

He remembered her dumb, apologetic caresses and her pathetically clumsy tenderness—or reflex; he could never be sure—and her eager yet reluctant hands and the always slightly hurt, slightly accusing look in her eyes, as if at every instant she was ready for a stinging blow, and her great sighs, muted as if fearing to be heard and . . .

He was drunk, screaming meaninglessly, and the bartender threw him out. The pavement cut his face. When he awoke, it was morning and he was in a strange room and she was in bed beside him.

She said, "I am Hertha. I brought you home. I will go with you."

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The paralysis set in. He could not move. The tears froze on his cheeks, and he lay inert, thinking of her almost mindlessly fighting for his life in the alien outside.

Then she was back in the hut. So soon?

She looked at him, smiled through the transparent helmet at him. He could hear the precious oxygen hiss in to compensate for the air that had been lost when she entered.

He could see her eyes. They were proud. Relieved, too, as if she had been afraid he would be gone when she returned. He felt she had hurried back to be sure that he was still there.

She knelt by the flower bed and, without removing her suit, she held up the plant proudly. He could see the hard-packed dirt in the roots. Fascinated, he watched her scrape a planting hole. He watched her set the plant delicately and pat the soil with care.

Then she stood up.

He tried to move, to cry out. He could not.

He watched her until she went out of the range of his fixed eyes. She was going to the airlock again.

After a moment he heard the familiar hiss of oxygen.

She was going to get a great number of plants.

But one at a time.

—KRIS NEVILLE

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) of Galaxy Science Fiction, published monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1951.

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2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Galaxy Publishing Corp., 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y.; (stockholder) Bernard Kaufman, 2 Horatio Street, New York, N. Y.

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GALAXY PUBLISHING CORP.
BERNARD KAUFMAN, President

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of October, 1951. *Donald M. Garvelmann*, Commissioner of Deeds, New York City. New York County Clerk's No. 85. Commission expires August 14, 1953.

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Installment 2

the demolished man

By ALFRED BESTER

As with all premeditated murder, one thing was unpremeditated. Could Reich, with his riches — and a crooked Esper — correct it quickly enough?

Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

SYNOPSIS

When telepathy emerged as an extracted recessive characteristic, possessors of extra-sensory perception became valuable members of society. Every industry and profession had its Espers, who, in addition to having normal skills, were able to probe the mind for unknown or concealed meanings. Members of the Esper Guild and known as "peepers," they were divided into classes according to the depth they could penetrate: 3rds could peep the conscious mind; 2nds dug past that to the preconscious and subconscious;

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while 1sts, the elite of the Guild, could explore every crevice of the deeply buried unconscious mind.

Because of Espers, premeditated murder was doomed. Telepaths could peep the intent of a killer before the crime, or peep the evidence needed for conviction after the murder. No killer had escaped the dreaded Demolition Chamber in Kingston Hospital in 70 years.

Despite this, Ben Reich, piratical owner of Sacrament, Inc., was driven to plan the murder of his bitter commercial enemy, Craye D'Courtney, of the D'Courtney Cartel on Mars. A recurrent nightmare about a Man With No Face made him realize that killing was the only solution to the economic war.

With the aid of Augustus T8, E.M.D.1 (Esper Medical Doctor 1st class), and Jerry Church, a 2nd class peeper ostracized from the Guild, Reich went to a party at Maria Beaumont's house. In the course of an ancient game called "Sardine" which Reich instigated by sending his hostess an old book containing the game, Reich slipped up to the hidden suite of D'Courtney and murdered him. The killing was unexpectedly witnessed by D'Courtney's daughter, Barbara, who ran from the house in hysterical terror with the murder weapon in her hand, and mysteriously disappeared into the giant city.

Reich, using a song that had been fiendishly written on order to stick in the memory like a fish hook, had prevented peepers from probing his intent to murder. Now he had to get out and find the girl. But he forced T8 to stay with him so they could make an unsuspicious exit. Thanking Maria Beaumont for the interesting evening, however, Reich found blood falling from the ceiling where D'Courtney's dead body lay in the room above, spattering on his cuff.

The slaying was discovered. Reich was trapped in the house with his victim, while the one witness who could bring him to Demolition was free to go anywhere she pleased . . . even to Preston Powell, Esper Prefect of the Police Psychotic Division . . . a 1st, deadly in his ability to pry into unconscious motivations.

VII

AT 12:30 A.M., the Emergency Patrol arrived at Beaumont House in response to precinct notification: "GZ. Beaumont. YLP-R" which, translated, meant: "An act or omission forbidden by law has been reported at Beaumont House; 9 Park South."

At 12:50, the Panty Pickups arrived in response to an anonymous call: "Get up to The Gilt

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Corpse. Man dead in a brawl." They were summarily ejected by the police and hung hopefully around the house.

At 1:00 A. M., Preston Powell arrived at Beaumont House in response to a frantic call from a deputy inspector: "I tell you, Powell, it's Felony Triple-A! I don't know whether to be grateful or scared; but I know none of us is equipped to handle it."

"What can't you handle?"

"Look here, Powell. Murder's abnormal. Only a distorted Thought Pattern can produce death by violence. Right?"

"Yes."

"Which is why there hasn't been a successful Triple-A in over seventy years. A man can't walk around with a distorted pattern, hatching murder. You peepers always pick 'em up before they go into action."

"So far," agreed Powell. "Now here's a killing that must have been carefully planned . . . and the killer was never noticed, even by Maria Beaumont's peeper secretaries. That means there couldn't have been anything to notice. He must have a passable pattern and yet be abnormal enough to murder. How the hell can we resolve a paradox like that?"

"No idea yet. Any prospects?"

"Nothing but inconsistencies. We don't know what killed D'Courtney; his daughter's disappeared; somebody robbed D'Courtney's guards of one hour and we can't figure how. And besides—"

"Don't go any further. I'll be right over."

The great hall of Beaumont House blazed with harsh white light. Uniformed police were everywhere. The white-smocked technicians from Lab were scurrying like beetles. Four Moltecs, glittering snails of coils and glowing tubes, clucked fussily over the floors, nursed by Moltec squads who worked with the drilled precision of eclipse camera crews. In the center of the hall, the party guests were assembled.

As Powell came down the east ramp, he felt the wave of hostility that greeted him. He telepathed quickly to Charley $$on, Police Inspector 2: *"What's the situation, Chas?"*

"Scramble."

Switching to their informal police code of scrambled images, reversed meanings and personal symbols, $$on continued: *"Peepers here. Play it safe."* He brought Powell up to date.

"I see. Nasty. What's everybody doing lumped out on the floor? You staging something?"

"The villain-friend act."

"Necessary?"

"It's a rotten crowd. Pampered. You'll have to do some tricky coaxing to get anything out of them. I'll be the villain; you be

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their friend, of course."

"Right. Start recording."

Halfway down the ramp, Powell halted. An expression of shocked indignation appeared on his face.

"$$son!" he snapped. Every eye turned to him.

Inspector $$on faced Powell. In a brutal voice, he said: "Here, sir."

"Is this your concept of the proper conduct of an investigation? To herd a group of innocent people together like cattle?"

"They're not innocent," $$on growled. "A man's been killed."

"$$on, they will be presumed to be innocent and treated with every courtesy until the murderer is uncovered."

"What?" $$on sneered. "This rotten, lousy, high-society pack of hyenas—"

"How dare you! Apologize at once!"

$$on took a deep breath and clenched his fists angrily, then turned to the staring guests. "My apologies," he grumbled.

"And I'm warning you, $$on," Powell snapped, "if anything like this happens again, I'll break you. Now get out of my sight."

Powell descended to the floor of the hall and smiled at the guests. "Ladies and gentlemen, of course I know you all by sight. I'm not that famous, so let me introduce myself. Preston Powell, Prefect of the Psychotic Division. Two antiquated titles, eh? Prefect and Psychotic. We won't let them bother us." He advanced toward Maria Beaumont with hand outstretched. "You've had a trying time, I know. These boors in uniform."

A pleased rustle ran through the guests. The glowering hostility began to fade. Maria took Powell's hand dazedly, mechanically beginning to preen herself.

"Dear Prefect . . ." She was an aging little girl, clinging to his arm. "I've been so terrified."

Powell snapped his fingers behind him. To the captain who stepped forward, he said: "Conduct Madame and her guests to the study. No guards."

The captain cleared his throat. "About Madame's guests. One of them arrived after the felony was reported. An attorney, Mr. Jordan."

Powell found Sam Jordan, Attorney-At-Law 2, in the crowd, and telepathed to him.

"What brought you here, Sam?"

"Business. Called by my cli(Ben Reich)ent."

"That shark. Wait here with Reich. We'll get squared off."

"That was an effective act with $$on."

"Hell. You crack our scramble?"

"Not a chance. But I know you two. Gentle Chas playing a bully is one for the books."

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$$on broke in from across the hall where he was apparently sulking: *"Don't blow it, Sam."*

"Are you crazy?" At the suggestion that Jordan might smash the most sacred ethic of the Guild, he radiated a blast of indignation that made $$on grin.

All this in the second while Powell kissed Maria's brow with chaste devotion and gently disengaged himself from her tremulous grasp.

"Ladies and gentlemen—to the study, please."

The crowd of guests moved off, conducted by the captain. They were chattering with renewed animation. Through the buzz and the laughter, Powell felt the iron elbows of a rigid telepathic block. He recognized those elbows and permitted his astonishment to show.

"Gus! Gus T8!"

"Oh. Hello, Powell."

"You? Lurking & Slinking?"

"Gus?" $$on popped out. *"Here? I never tagged him."*

"What the devil are you hiding for?"

Chaotic response of anger, chagrin, fear of lost reputation, self-deprecation, shame—

"Ease off, Gus. Won't do you any harm to let a little scandal rub off on you. Make you more human. Stay here & help. Got a hunch I can use another 1st. This one is going to be a Triple-A stinker."

AFTER the hall was cleared of guests, Powell examined the three men who remained with him. Sam Jordan was a heavy-set man, thick, solid, with a shining bald head and a friendly blunt-featured face. Little T8 was nervous and twitchy . . . more so than usual. Too bad the plastic surgeons couldn't add six inches to his height. Would solve a lot of T8's psychological problems.

And the notorious Ben Reich. Powell inspected him for the first time. Tall, broad-shouldered, determined, exuding a tremendous aura of charm and power. There was kindliness in that power, but it was corroded by the habit of tyranny. Reich's eyes were fine and keen, but his mouth was too small and sensitive and looked oddly like a scar. A magnetic man, with something about him that was repelling.

Reich smiled. Spontaneously, they shook hands.

"Do you take everybody off guard like this, Reich?"

"The secret of my success," Reich grinned.

An unexpected chemotropism was drawing them together. It was dangerous. Powell tried to shake it off.

He turned to Jordan: "Now then, Sam?"

"Reich called me in to represent him and all the other suspects. No telepathy, Pres. This has got to stay on the objective

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evel. I'm here to see that it does. 'll have to be present at every examination."

"You can't stop peeping, Sam. You've got no legal right. We can dig out all we can—"

"Provided it's with the consent of the examinee. I'm here to tell you whether you've got that consent or not."

Powell looked at Reich. "You understand your legal rights and duties?"

"Vaguely."

"Vaguely?" Powell smiled. "I'm supposed to believe that from the Shark of Sacrament?"

"Sometimes the shark plays possum. This is one of those times."

"Well, I'll lay it out for you. Every man has the right to refuse telepathic examination . . . just as he has the right to refuse oral interrogation."

"We've still got the Fifth Amendment," Jordan said.

Powell nodded. "But the law holds that you can't answer some questions and refuse to answer others. It's got to be all or none."

"I understand," said Reich.

"Of course, if you stand on the Fifth Amendment in a Triple-A Felony and refuse to answer any questions in any manner, you force us to draw the conclusion that you have guilt to conceal."

"You're not required to respond to that," Jordan cut in.

"I was going to ask about the peeping," Reich said.

"Well," Powell replied, "if you decide to open the door, you've got to answer all questions, but you don't have to submit to telepathic examination. That's optional. Oral replies will satisfy the law."

"In fact," Jordan added, "the law requires the police examiner to request permission for a TP probe on each separate question. If you refuse permission, I'm here to make it stick. You don't have to confide anything in me. You tell me you don't want to be peeped and I'll see to it that you're not. I don't have to know what's in your mind to do that."

"Of course," Powell said pleasantly, "there are many questions you can't possibly object to being peeped on. For instance, if I asked you what you had for dinner tonight . . . ."

"He'd have every right in the world to refuse telepathic examination on that point."

Powell turned to Reich. "Want it that way?"

Reich nodded.

"Sam's a 2nd. I'm a 1st. I can pull slick stuff on him. Want to wait until you can get hold of another 1st to represent you? It's your right."

"No," Reich said slowly. "I trust Jordan. I trust you. I don't think he'll let you pull any stuff on him. I don't think you'll try."

"Thanks. What was the idea

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of getting a lawyer so fast? Are you mixed up in this mess?"

"You don't run Sacrament without building up a stockpile of secrets that have got to be protected."

"Why should Jordan represent the other guests?"

"Get out of there, Pres."

"Stop throwing blocks. I'm just trying to get his general emotional response to the rest of the suspects."

"You've got no right to get it that way."

"The hell I haven't. That one was decided by the Carmody Case twenty-five years ago. We can build up the general background so long as we don't look for specific data."

"Yes, provided the oral question clearly indicates the purpose and scope of the peeping. Yours did nothing of the kind."

"I'll rephrase the question," Powell said, before Reich could answer. "Did you feel that any or all of the other guests particularly required the services of Mr. Jordan, a leading Esper Attorney? I'd like to peep your answer on that for your general emotional response."

"You don't have to give permission," Jordan said.

"I won't," Reich replied.

"Will you give me an oral answer?"

"I will," Reich said. "They were all scared. Maria was petrified. She begged me to help. This was the best I could do."

"Would you care to tell me why you refused to be peeped on that answer?"

"Don't even bother,"—Jordan advised. "Pres has no right to ask that. No one has. The Matter of the Estate of Alan Courtney settled that."

"Hell," Powell said ruefully. "You've stopped me. Let's start the investigation."

They turned and walked toward the study. Across the hall, $$on scrambled and asked: *"Pres, why'd you let Sam tie you in legal knots?"*

"While he was busy tying the legal knots, I got the one thing I was after."

"What was that?"

"An answer on the record from Ben Reich. He's opened the door, Chas. He can't close it any more."

There was a moment of stunned silence, and then, as Powell went through the North arch to the study, a broadcast of fervent admiration followed him: *"I bow, Pres. I bow to the Master."*

THE "study" of Beaumont House was constructed on the lines of a Turkish Bath. The floor was a mosaic of jacinth, spinel and sunstone. The walls, cross-hatched with gold wire cloisonne, were glittering with inset synthetic stones: . . . ruby, emerald, garnet, chrysolite, amethyst, to-

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paz . . . all containing various portraits of the owner. There were scatter rugs of brocatelle, and scores of chairs and lounges.

Powell entered the room and walked directly to the center, leaving Reich, T8 and Jordan behind them. He looked around him, accurately gauging the mass psyche of these sybarites, and measuring the tactics he would have to use.

He lit a cigarette. "You all know, of course, that I'm a peeper. Probably this fact has alarmed some of you. You imagine that I'm standing here like some fabulous monster, probing your mental plumbing. Well, Jordan wouldn't let me if I could. And, frankly, mass peeping is a trick no Esper can perform. It's difficult enough to probe a single individual. It's impossible when dozens of Telepathic Patterns are confusing the picture. And when a group of unique, highly individual people like yourselves is gathered, we find ourselves completely at your mercy."

"And he said *I* had charm," Reich muttered.

"Tonight," Powell went on, "you were playing a delightful ancient game called 'Sardine.' I wish I had been invited, Madame. You must remember me next time . . ."

"I will," Maria promised. "I will, dear Prefect."

"In the course of that game, old D'Courtney was killed. We're almost positive it was premeditated murder. We'll be certain after Lab has finished its work. But let's assume that it is a Triple-A Felony. That will enable us to play another ancient game called 'Murder.'"

There was an interested response from the guests. Powell continued on the same casual course, carefully turning the most shocking crime in seventy years into a morsel of amusement.

"In the game of 'Murder,'" he said, "a make-believe victim is killed. A make-believe detective must discover who killed the victim. He asks questions of the make-believe suspects. Everyone must tell the truth except the killer, who is permitted to lie. The detective compares stories, deduces who is lying, and uncovers the killer. I thought you might enjoy playing this game."

A voice asked, "How?"

Another added, "I'm just one of the tourists."

"A murder investigation," Powell smiled, "explores three facets of a crime. First, the motive. Second, the method. Third, the opportunity. Our Lab people are taking care of the second and third. The first we can discover in our game. If we do, we'll be able to crack the other two problems that have Lab stumped now. Did you know that they can't figure out what killed D'Court-

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ney? Did you know that D'Courtney's daughter has disappeared? She left the house while you were playing 'Sardine.' Did you know that D'Courtney's guards were mysteriously short-circuited? Somebody robbed them of a full hour in time. We'd all like to know how."

They were hanging at the very edge of the trap, breathless, fascinated. It had to be sprung with infinite caution.

"Death, disappearance, and subjective time machines . . . we can find out all about them through motive. I'll be the make-believe detective; you'll be the make-believe suspects. You'll tell me the truth . . . all except the killer, of course. We'll expect him to lie. But we'll trap him and bring this party to a triumphant finish if you'll give me permission to make a telepathic examination of each of you."

"Oh!" cried Maria in alarm.

"Wait, Madame. All I want is

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your permission. I won't have to peep. Because, you see, if all the innocent suspects grant permission, then the one who refuses must be guilty."

"Can he pull that?" Reich whispered to Jordan.

Jordan nodded.

"Just picture the scene for a moment." Powell was building the drama for them, turning the room into a stage. "I ask formally: 'Will you permit me to make a TP examination?' Then I go around this room." He began a slow circuit, bowing to each of the guests in turn. "And the answers come: 'Yes. Yes. Of course. Why not?' And then suddenly a dramatic pause." Powell stopped before Reich, erect, terrifying. " 'You, sir,' I repeat. 'Will you give me your permission to peep?' "

They all watched, hypnotized. Even Reich was aghast, transfixed by the pointing finger and the fierce scowl.

"Hesitation. His face flushes red, then ghastly white as the blood drains out. You hear the tortured refusal: 'No!' " The Prefect turned and enveloped them all with an electrifying gesture: "And in that thrilling moment, we know we have captured the killer!"

He almost had them. Almost. But Tom Moyse had bastardy in his soul; Gloria Blomefield, Jr., had adultery in her soul; Tony Asj had shame in her soul; Nick Boutman had perjury in his soul.

"No!" Maria cried. They all shot to their feet and shouted: "No! No!"

"It was a beautiful try, Pres, but there's your answer."

Powell was still charming in defeat. "I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but I really can't blame you. Only a fool would trust a cop." He sighed. "One of my assistants will tape the oral statements from those of you who care to make statements. Mr. Jordan will be on hand to advise and protect you." He glanced dolefully at Jordan. *"And louse me."*

"Don't pull at my heart-strings like that, you faker. This is the best Triple-A in seventy years. My big chance. Are you going to sob me out of it?"

"Hell." Powell said. He winked at Reich and left the room.

LAB was finished in the lavish orchid Wedding Suite. Kr½t, abrupt, testy, harrassed, handed Powell the reports and said, "This is a lousy assignment!"

Powell looked down at D'Courtney's body. "Suicide?" he snapped. He was always peppery with Kr½t, who was comfortable with no other relationship.

"Not a chance. No weapon."

"What killed him?"

"We don't know."

"Why, he's got a hole in his

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head you could jet through to the Moon!"

"Entry above the uvula. Exit below the fontanelle. Death instantaneous. But what drilled the hole through his skull? We don't know!"

"Hard ray?"

"No burn."

"Crystalization?"

"No freeze."

"Nitro vapor charge?"

"No ammonia residue."

"Acid?"

"Acid spray couldn't burst the back of his skull like that."

"A dirk or a knife?"

"Impossible. Have you any idea how much force is necessary to penetrate like this? Couldn't be done."

"Well, I've just about exhausted penetrating weapons. No, wait. What about a projectile?"

"Not a chance here. There's no projectile. None in the wound. None in the room."

"Damnation!"

"I agree."

"Have you got anything for me? Anything at all?"

"Yes. He was eating candy before his death. Found a fragment of gel in his mouth . . . bit of standard candy wrapping."

"And?"

"No candy in the suite."

"He might have eaten it all."

"No candy in his stomach. Anyway, he wouldn't be eating candy with that throat."

"Why not?"

"Psychogenic cancer. Bad. He couldn't talk, let alone eat candy."

"Hell and damnation. We need that weapon, whatever it is."

"Go find the daughter," Kr½t said. "I'm telling you she's got it. She popped the old man and blew out of here with it."

"You mean to tell me she went to all this trouble? Waited until they were visiting? Waited until the middle of the night? Then killed him this bizarre way? Tell me why."

"I can't tell you why she killed him," Kr½t said with frantic calm. "I can't tell you how she killed him." Suddenly he burst out: "I can't even tell time! Powell, I resign."

Which made Kr½t's seventeenth resignation in two years. Ignoring it, Powell fingered the sheaf of reports, staring at the waxen body, whistling a crooked tune. He remembered reading a romance once about an Esper who could read a corpse . . . like that old myth about photographing the retina of a dead eye. He wished it could be done.

"Well," he sighed at last, "they licked us on motive, and they've licked us on method. Let's hope the Moltec crew can give us something on opportunity, Kr½t, or we'll never bring Reich down."

"Reich? Ben Reich? What about him?"

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"It's Gus T8 I'm worried about most," Powell murmured. "If he's mixed up in this . . . What? Oh, Reich? He's the killer, Kr½t. I slicked Sam Jordan down in Maria Beaumont's study. Staged an act and misdirected Sam while I peeped his client. This an off the record, of course, but I got enough to convince me Reich's our man."

"You did?" Kr½t exclaimed.

"But that's a long way from Demolition, brother. A long, long way."

Moodily, Powell took leave of the Lab Chief, loafed through the anteroom and descended to field headquarters in the picture gallery.

"And I like Reich," he muttered.

THE Moltec (Molecular Distortion Detector) was simply a mechanical bloodhound. In the XXth Century, when explosive firearms were in use, it was the custom of malefactors to destroy the identifying numbers on their weapons with file and acid. They were unaware that the blow of the tool which punched the numbers into the weapon so altered the molecular structure of the metal that the figures could be detected by X-ray and other methods after the surface had been obliterated.

The Moltec operated similarly. You might walk carefully across a floor, with dry feet, sweeping away all footprints, leaving no visible train—unaware that your step left an unmistakable and characteristic molecular stress trail. This trail the Moltec followed, crawling over floor, ramp and stairs, clucking and buzzing monomaniacally.

The trail was printed in tiny arrows on a gridded scale map of transparent plastic film, printed in a separate color for each suspect. When the investigation was completed, the transparencies were stacked one on top of the other, and when you looked down into the pile you saw at a glance all the twisting, turning human paths.

$$on set the packed charts before Powell, who examined the twining colored threads for a moment and then looked up wearily.

"I know, Pres. It would have been easier if they hadn't spotted D'Courtney's blood dripping through the floor. But when they all tore up there in a posse, that loused us."

Powell inspected the collective map again. Threads of color wandered through the great hall of Beaumont House, the music room, the study, the stage, the fountains, and finally into the Panty Projection Room. From there a thick river of prismatic color streamed back through the hall, up the stairs, through the

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picture gallery into the Wedding Suite.

"There's the girl." $$on indicated a yellow trail of arrows that started in one of the bedrooms of the Wedding Suite, came down the corridor, entered the orchid room, and, after a few confused circles, left the room and led straight through the house to the street.

Powell and $$on began the lightning exchanges that characterized peeper conversations:

"Who's this, Chas? The peach-and-emerald colored trails. They left the house too."

"Couple of guests who couldn't stomach that Sardine game, bless 'em. Left early. One is a psych-song-writer named Duffy Wyg&. The other's Wally Chervil's boy. Young Galen."

"Oops."

"No, he's in the right orbit. Pres. He doesn't belong to Beaumont's Carnal Circle. I got it straight from the peeper secretaries. Gally crashed the party on a bet. Apparently he couldn't jet out fast enough."

"Pick 'em up anyway and have a talk, Charley."

"In the works."

"Right. Which trail is Reich's?"

"Why Reich in particular? What? Him?"

"Uh-huh."

"My God! What it must be like to be a 1st."

"Take your Guild exams and find out. Which is Reich?"

"Took 'em again last month. Failed again. Reich is the scarlet trail."

"Thought so. Look at it, Chas. Reich went up to the orchid suite twice and came down twice. See that?"

"Yep. And?"

"That could be opportunity. He went up once with the posse; but he went up once before to kill D'Courtney."

"You'll never prove it, Pres."

"Can the guards help?"

"Nope. They've lost one solid hour. Kr½t says their retinal rhodopsin was destroyed. That's the visual purple . . . what you see with. As far as the guards are concerned, they were on duty and alert. Nothing happened until the mob suddenly appeared and Maria was screeching at them for falling asleep on the job . . . which they swear they did not."

"But we know it was Reich."

"You know it was Reich. Nobody else does."

"He went up there while the guests were playing the Sardine game. He kerflumoxed the guards' visual purple some way and robbed them of an hour of time. He went into the orchid suite and killed D'Courtney. The girl got mixed up in it, somehow, which is why she ran."

"How did he kerflumox? How did he kill D'Courtney? And why?"

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"I don't know any of the answers . . . yet."

"You'll never get a Demolition that way."

"That I do know."

"You've got to show motive, method and opportunity, objectively. The Moltec evidence won't stand up alone. It'll need powerful supporting evidence. All you've got is a peeper's knowledge that it was Reich who killed D'Courtney."

"Uh-huh."

"Did you peep how or why?"

"Couldn't get in deep enough . . . not with Sam Jordan watching me."

"And you'll probably never get in. Sam's too careful."

"Damnation! Charley, we need the girl."

"Barbara D'Courtney?"

"Yes. She's the key. If she can tell us what she saw and why she ran, we'll satisfy a court. Collate everything we've got so far (which is practically nothing) and file it. It won't do us any good without the girl. Let everyone go. We'll have to backtrack on Reich . . . see what collateral evidence we can dig up, but—"

"But it won't help without that goddam girl."

"Times like this, Charley, I hate women. For Christ's sake, why are they all trying to get me married."

Image of a horse laughing.

Sar(censored)castic retort.

Sar(censored)donic reply.

(censored)

HAVING had the last word, Powell got to his feet and left the picture gallery. He crossed the overpass, descended to the music room and entered the main hall. He saw Reich, Jordan and T8 talking intently alongside the fountain. Once again he fretted over the frightening problem of T8. If the little peeper really was mixed up with Reich, as Powell had sensed at the party last week, he might be mixed up in this killing.

The idea of a 1st class Esper, a pillar of the Guild, participating in murder was unthinkable; and, if actually fact, hell to prove. Nobody ever got anything from a 1st without full consent. And if T8 was (incredibly, impossibly, 100-1 against) working with Reich, Reich himself might prove impregnable.

Resolving on one last propaganda attack before he was forced to resort to police work, Powell caught their eyes, and directed a quick command to the peepers: *"Sam, Gus—jet. I want to say something to Reich I don't want you to hear. I won't peep him or record his words. That's a pledge."*

Jordan and T8 nodded. Reich watched them go and then looked at Powell. "Scare 'em off?" he inquired.

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"Warned them off. Sit down, Reich."

They sat on the edge of the basin, looking at each other, a chemotropic smile on their lips. They sat in a warm, friendly silence.

"No," Powell said after a pause, "I'm not peeping you."

"Didn't think you were. But you did in Maria's study, eh?"

"Felt that?"

"No. Guessed. It's what I would have done."

"Neither of us is very trustworthy, eh?"

"It's the cowards and sore losers who hide behind fair play."

"What about honor?"

"We've got honor in us, but it's our own code . . . not make-believe rules."

Powell shook his head sadly. "You're two men, Reich. One of them's wonderful; the other's rotten. If you were all killer, it wouldn't be so bad. But there's half louse and half saint in you, and that makes it worse."

"I knew it was going to be bad when you winked," Reich grinned. "You really scare me, Powell. I never can tell when the punch is coming or which way to duck."

"Then, for God's sake, stop ducking and get it over with," Powell said. His voice burned. "I'm going to lick you on this one, Ben. I'm going to strangle the lousy killer in you, because I admire the saint. This is the beginning of the end for you. You know it. Why don't you make it easier for yourself?"

"And give up the best fight of my life with the best enemy I ever met?"

Powell shrugged angrily. They both arose. Instinctively, their hands met in the four-way clasp of final farewell.

"I lost a great partner in you, Pres," Reich smiled.

"You lost a great man in yourself, Ben."

"Enemies?"

"Enemies."

VIII

THE police prefect of a city of seventeen and one-half millions cannot be tied down to an office. He does not have a desk. He does not have files, memoranda, dossiers. He has three Esper secretaries, memory wizards all, who carry within their skulls the minutiae of his business. They accompany him within headquarters like a triple index. Occasionally, one of them joins him on the field while the others remain behind to act as his proxy. Surrounded by his flying squad, Powell jetted through headquarters, assembling the material for his fight.

To Commissioner Crabbe he laid out the broad outlines once more: "We need motive, method and opportunity, Commissioner.

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We've got opportunity, but it won't stand alone. Mr. Peetcy'll never buy it. It's got to be bolstered by the other two. I'm speaking of objective evidence for the court. Now, I'm ready to go all out on Ben Reich and Sacrament. I want to ask you a straight question—are you willing to go all out too?"

Crabbe, who resented Espers, turned purple and shot up from the ebony chair behind the ebony desk in his ebony-and-silver office. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Don't sound for undercurrents, sir. I'm merely asking if you're tied to Reich and Sacrament in any way. Will it be possible for Reich to come to you and ask to have the rockets cooled?"

"God damn your impudence, Powell—"

"Excuse me, sir, I'm just trying to be realistic. I'm a career criminologist. You're a politician. Politicians must have support. Has Reich been one of your supporters?"

"No, he's not."

"Sir: On December fourth last, Commissioner Crabbe discussed the Langley Case with you. Extract follows:

Powell: There's a tricky financial angle to this business, Commissioner. Sacrament may hold us up with a demurrer and attempt seizure of the Langley assets.

Crabbe: Reich's given me his word he won't; and I can always depend on Ben Reich. He backed me up for County Attorney.

End quote."

"Right. I thought I was reaching for something." Powell dropped his tact and glared at Crabbe. "What about your campaign for County D.A.? Reich backed you for that, didn't he?"

"He did."

"And I'm supposed to believe he hasn't continued supporting you?"

"Yes, you are. He backed me then. He has not supported me since."

"Then I have the beacon on the Reich murder?"

"Why do you insist that Ben Reich killed that man? It's ridiculous. You've got no proof. Your own admission."

"Do I have the beacon on the Reich murder?"

"You do."

"But with strong reservations. Make a note, boys. He's scared to death of Reich. Make another note. So am I."

TO his staff, Powell said: "Now look, you all know what a coldblooded monster Peetcy is. I swear he gives me nightmares . . . screaming for facts, facts.

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We'll have to produce evidence to convince him he ought to prosecute. To do that, we're going to pull the Rough & Smooth on Reich."

"Brief us," $$on said.

"Go back to your Academy training, gentlemen. Remember that ancient device for tailing a tough subject? Assign a clumsy operative and a slick one to the subject. The cluck didn't know the smoothie was on the job. Neither did the subject. After he'd shaken the rough tail, he imagined he was clear. That made it a cinch for the slicker. That's what we're going to do to Reich."

"Check," said $$on.

"Go through every department. Pull out the hundred dumbest cops you can locate. Put 'em into plainclothes and assign' em to Reich. Go up to Lab and get hold of every crackpot robot gimmick that's been submitted in the last ten years. Put all the gadgets to work on Reich. Make it a rough tail, but the kind he'll have to work to shake."

"Any specific areas?" $$on inquired.

"All except one. Why were they playing 'Sardine?' Who suggested the game? Beaumont's secretaries went on record that Reich couldn't be peeped because he had a song kicking around in his skull. What song? Who wrote it? Where'd Reich hear it? The guards were blasted with some kind of Visual Purple Ionizer. Check all research on that sort of thing. What killed D'Courtney? Let's have lots of weapon research. Backtrack on Reich's relations with D'Courtney. What and how much does Reich stand to win by D'Courtney's death?"

"All this Rough? We'll louse the case, Pres!"

"Maybe. I don't think so. Reich's a successful man. He'll imagine he's outsmarting us every time he outmaneuvers one of our decoys. Keep him thinking that. The Pantys'll tear us apart. Play along with it. We're all going to be blundering, outwitted cops, and while Reich's eating himself fat on that diet—"

"You'll be eating Reich," $$on grinned. "What about the girl?"

"She's the one exception to the rough routine. We level with her. I want a description and photo sent to every police officer in the county within one hour. On the bottom of the stat announce that the man who locates her will automatically be jumped five grades."

"*Sir: Regulations forbid elevation of more than three ranks.*"

"To hell with regulations," Powell snapped to his secretary. "Five grades to the man who finds Barbara D'Courtney. I've got to get that girl."

IN Sacrament Tower, Ben Reich shoved every piezo crystal off his desk into the startled hands

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of his intimidated secretaries.

"Get the hell out of here and take this with you," he growled. "For a while the office coasts without me. Understand?"

"But the Tycho estimates . . ."

"You people handle it. Submit the estimates. Brush off Salzman on the City Contract. Remember to have Laslow bid on those Venus auctions. Send Pickfield the Mandamus Writs. Sign the shop contracts with Amalgamated Brotherhood and don't bother me."

"Mr. Reich, we'd understood you were contemplating taking over the D'Courtney interests now that Craye D'Courtney's dead. If you—"

"I'm taking care of that right now. That's why I don't want to be bothered."

He pushed them out, slammed the door and locked it. He went to the phone, punched BD-12,232 and the image of Jeremy Church appeared against a background of pawnshop debris.

"You?" Church snarled.

"Still interested in reinstatement?"

Church started. "What about it?"

"You've made yourself a deal. I want a lot in return."

"For God's sake, Ben, anything! Just ask me."

"Unlimited service. You know the price I'm paying. Are you selling?"

"I'm selling, Ben! Yes!"

"I want that blind son of a bitch. The red-headed one."

"Keno Quizzard? He isn't safe, Ben. Nobody gets anything from Quizzard."

"Set up a meeting. Same place. This is like old times, eh, Jerry? Only this time it's going to have a happy ending."

THE usual line of applicants was assembled in the anteroom of the Esper Guild Institute when Powell entered. The hopeful hundreds, all ages, all sexes, all classes, dreaming that they had the magic power that could make life the fulfillment of fantasy, unaware of the heavy responsibility that power entailed. The repugnant odor of those wishes came to Powell from the line: *Read minds and make a killing on the market . . .* (Guild Law forbade speculation or gambling by peepers) . . . *Read minds and know the answers to all the exam questions . . .* (That was a schoolboy, unaware that Esper Proctors were hired by Examination Boards to prevent that kind of peeper-cheating) . . . *Read minds and know what people really think of me . . . Read minds and know which girls are willing . . .*

At the desk, the receptionist wearily broadcast on the broadest TP band: *"If you can hear me, please go through the door*

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on the left marked Employees Only."

To an assured young society woman with a checkbook in her hand, she was saying: "No, madam, the Guild does not charge for training and instruction, so spend your money on something else. We can do nothing for you."

Deaf to the basic test of the Guild, the woman turned away angrily.

If you can hear me, please go through the door on the left . . .

An elderly Negro suddenly detached himself from the line, glanced uncertainly at the receptionist, and then limped to the proper door. Powell nodded to the receptionist and followed the Latent.

Inside, Jennings and Whitehead were enthusiastically shaking the surprised man's hand and patting him on the back. Powell joined them for a moment and added his congratulations. It was always a happy day for the Guild when they unearthed another Esper.

Powell walked down the corridor toward the president's suite. He passed a kindergarten where thirty children and ten adults were mixing speech and thought in a frightful patternless stew. Their instructor was patiently broadcasting: "*Think, class. Words are not necessary. Remember to break the speech reflex. Repeat the first rule after me'. . .*"

And the class chanted: "Eli... inate the larynx."

Powell winced and moved o... The wall opposite the kinderga... ten was covered by a gold plaq... on which was engraved the sacr... words of the Galen Pledge:

I will look upon him who shall h... taught me this art as one of my p... ents. I will share my substance w... him, and I will supply his necessi... if he be in need. I will regard ... offspring even as my own brethren a... I will teach them this art by prece... by lecture and by every mode ... teaching; and I will teach this art ... all others.

The regimen I adopt shall be f... the benefit of mankind according ... my ability and judgment, and not f... hurt or wrong. I will give no dead... thought to any, though it be asked ... me; nor will I counsel such.

Whatsoever mind I enter, there w... I go for the benefit of man, refrainin... from all wrongdoing and corruptio...

Whatsoever thoughts I see or hear ... the mind of man which ought not ... be noised abroad, I will keep silen... thereon, counting such things as sacr... secrets.

In the lecture hall, a class of 3rds was earnestly weaving simple basket patterns while they discussed current events. There was one little overdue 2nd, a twelve-year-old urchin who was adding zigzag ad libs to the dull discussion and peaking every si... with a spoken word. The words rhymed and were barbed comments on the speakers. It was very amusing and amazingly precocious.

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Powell halted and, below the class threshold, asked the instructor: *"Who's the infant phenomenon?"*

"Dennis McCallion."

"Reported him to the Board yet?"

"Going to send one in today."

"Well, add a recommendation from me. Suggest he be sent directly to an alpha class. If he keeps on like this, he may establish a new peeper rating . . . above the 1st."

Half a dozen 2nds were taking their exams for advanced rating in the seminar room. They were clustered around Molly Chindo, the ament from Kingston Hospital, chatting, smoking, and uneasily evading Molly's mental passes. Molly was still ravishing . . . a blue-eyed, black-haired nymphomaniac who was also oligophrenic. It was a dirty trick to introduce the sexual angle and confuse the examinees, but a 1st rating had to be earned the hard way, and Molly was only one in a series of severe tests.

A group of college-age kids was loafing outside the president's suite, endlessly grousing about the endless educational problems of the peepers . . . the long hours of extra work at the Institute after their regular college lectures . . . the rigorous code of Guild ethics . . . the gloomy aspects of their futures, endless work, endless devotion to service . . .

"Oh, brother! If we could only get lost from peeping, how fast we'd shake it. Who wants to go through life like a walking saint? They ought to write an 11th Commandment: 'Thou shalt not deprive any man of the right to go to hell.'"

They signed off when Powell approached. As he entered the suite he said: "It isn't so bad. You get used to being admirable after a while." The spoken words shamed them, and a good thing too. They were in that stage when youngsters resist conditioning.

That couldn't be encouraged.

THE president's suite was in an uproar. All the office doors were open, and clerks and secretaries were scurrying. Old T'sung-Hsai, the president, a portly mandarin with shaven skull and benign features, stood in the center of his office and raged.

"I don't care what the honorable scoundrels call themselves," T'sung Hsai roared. "Talk to me about racial purity of the Guild, will they? I'll fill their concave ears. Miss Prinn!"

Helen Prinn crept into T-H's office.

"Take a letter to these devils. To the League of Esper Patriots. *Greetings, Powell. Your august presence honors these humble eyes. My threadbare office is perfumed with the joy of your*

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many-jeweled visage . . . The organized campaign to cut down Guild taxation for the education of Espers for the benefit of mankind is the action of a nest of roaches resisting the sterilization of a filthy kitchen. New paragraph . . ."

T-H wrenched himself from his diatribe and bowed profoundly to Powell. "*And has a joyous wife yet been found to enlarge the tree of your celestial family?*"

"*Not yet, sir.*"

"*Damn it, Powell, get married!*" T-H bellowed. "*I don't want to be stuck with this job forever.* Paragraph, Miss Prinn: You speak of the hardships of taxation, of preserving the aristocracy of Espers, of the unsuitability of the average man for Esper training. *What the hell do you want, Powell?*"

"*I want to use the grapevine, sir.*"

"*Well, don't bother me. I've got this three-tongued League of Lice on my back. Speak to Jenny about it.* Paragraph, Miss Prinn: You parasitic bastards want Esper powers turned into a monopoly, and no taxation so you can keep your loot like the corrupt, unashamed leeches you are—"

Powell tactfully closed the door and turned to Jenny James, who was quaking in a corner.

"*Really scared, Jenny?*"

Image of an eye winking and a question mark quaking.

"*When Papa T-H blows his top, we like him to think we're petrified. Makes him happier.*"

Powell dropped the official police description and portrait of Barbara D'Courtney on the secretary's desk. "*Here's something you can do for me, Jenny.*"

"*What a beautiful girl!*" Jenny exclaimed.

"*I want this sent out on the grapevine, marked urgent. Pass the word that the peeper who locates Barbara D'Courtney for me will have his Guild taxes remitted for a year.*"

"*Jeepers!*" Jenny sat bolt upright. "*Can you do that, Pres?*"

"*Council agreed to it.*"

"*This'll make the grapevine jump!*"

"*I want it to jump. I want every peeper to jump. Jenny. If I want anything for Xmas, I want that girl.*"

QUIZZARD'S casino had been cleared and polished during the afternoon break . . . the only break in the gambler's day. The eo and roulette tables were brushed, the gold birdcage sparkled, the hazard and bank crap boards gleamed green and white. On the cashier's desk, gold sovereigns—the standard coin of gambling and the underworld—were racked in tempting stacks. Reich sat at the billiard (genuine antique) table with Jerry Church

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and Keno Quizzard, the blind croupier. Quizzard was fat with flaming red beard, dead-white skin and malevolent dead-white eyes.

"Your price," Reich told Church, "you know already. And I'm warning you, Jerry, don't try to peep me. If you get into my head you're getting into Demolition."

Quizzard murmured in his clabbered blind man's voice: "As bad as that? I don't hanker for a Demol, Reich."

"Who does? What do you hanker for, Keno?"

Quizzard reached back and with sure fingers pulled a rouleau of sovereigns off the desk and let them cascade from one hand to the other. "Listen to what I hanker for."

"Name the best price you can figure, Keno."

"You got a hundred Ms laying around?"

"Hundred thousand? Right. That's the price."

"For the love of . . ." Church popped upright and stared at Reich. "A hundred thousand!"

"Make up your mind, Jerry," Reich said. "Do you want money or reinstatement?"

"It's almost worth— No. Am I crazy? I'll take reinstatement."

"Then stop drooling." Reich turned to Quizzard. "I know you, Keno. You've got an idea you can find out what I want and then shop around for higher bids. I want you committed right now. That's why I let you set the price."

"Yeah," Quizzard said slowly. "I had that idea, Reich." He smiled and the milk-white eyes disappeared in folds of skin. "I still got that idea."

"Then I'll tell you right now who'll buy from you. A man named Preston Powell. I don't know what he can pay."

"Whatever it is, I don't want it," Quizzard spat.

"I'm still waiting to hear from you."

"I told you it's a deal. I'm committed."

"I don't hear you, Keno."

"He knows, Jerry?"

"He knows," Church muttered. "He's been around."

With grudging respect, Quizzard reached into his pocket and withdrew his key chain. Reich followed suit. The keys were small platinum cylinders, radiant to operate photo-electric locks, but capable if you knew how— and the underworld knew how— of burning a tiny temporary tattoo into the skin. Reich and Quizzard stripped their arms and each tattooed the other above the elbow with the characteristic design of his key. It was the underworld's inviolable contract. A thief named Whittmaker had once conceived the idea of entering into such a contract for the

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purpose of burglary through a key duplicated from the tattooed design. He failed. It was impossible to duplicate the key. He also lost an ear. Plastic surgery had no difficulty in duplicating that.

"All right," Reich said, "now listen to this. First job. I want a girl. Her name is Barbara D'Courtney."

"The killing?" Quizzard nodded heavily. "I thought so."

"Any objections?"

Quizzard jingled gold from one hand to the other and shook his head.

"I want the girl. She blew out of the Beaumont House last night and no one knows where she landed. I want her, Keno. Before the police get her."

Quizzard nodded.

"She's about twenty-five. About five-five. Around a hundred and twenty pounds. Really stacked."

The fat lips smiled hungrily. The dead-white eyes glistened.

"Yellow hair. Black eyes. Black eyebrows. Heart-shaped face. Full mouth and a kind of aquiline nose . . . high bridge, sharp nostrils. She's got a face with character."

"Got the picture. Clothes?"

"She was wearing a silk dressing gown last time I saw her. Frosty white and translucent . . . like a frozen window. No shoes. No stockings. No hat. No jewelry. She was off her beam enough to tear out into the streets and disappear. I want her." Something compelled Reich to add: "I want her undamaged."

"With her hauling a freight like that? Have a heart, Reich." Quizzard licked his fat lips. "You don't stand a chance. *She* don't stand a chance."

"That what a hundred Ms are for. I stand a good chance if you get her fast enough."

"I may have to slush for her."

"Then slush. Check every bawdy house, bagnio, Blind Tiger and Frab Joint in the city. I want the girl. Understand?"

Quizzard nodded, still jingling the gold. "I understand."

Suddenly Reich reached across the table and slashed Quizzard's fat hands with the edge of his palm. The sovereigns chimed into the air.

"And I don't want any double-cross," Reich growled in a deadly voice. "Don't try any."

IX

ONE week of attack and defense, lunge and riposte, all fought on the surface while, deep below the agitated waters, Powell and Augustus T8 circled like silent sharks awaiting the onset of the real war.

Elsworth Finney, patrol officer now in plainclothes, believed in the surprise attack. He waylaid Maria Beaumont during a theater intermission, and before her hor-

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rified friends bellowed: "It was a frame. You was in cahoots with the killer. You set up the murder. That's why you was playin' that Sardine game. Go ahead, deny it."

The Gilt Corpse squawked and ran. As Officer Finney set off in hot pursuit, he was peeped deeply and thoroughly by one of Madam Beaumont's friends.

T8 to Reich: The cop was telling the truth. His department believes Maria was an accomplice.

Reich to T8: All right. We'll throw her to the wolves. Let the cops have her.

In consequence, Madam Beaumont was left unprotected. She took refuge, of all places, in the Loan Brokerage that was the source of her enormous income. Officer Finney located The Gilt Corpse there three hours later and subjected her to a merciless grilling in the office of the peeper Credit Supervisor. He was unaware that Preston Powell was just outside the office, chatting with the Supervisor:

Powell to staff: She got the game out of a book Reich gave her. Probably purchased at Winters. They handle that stuff. Pass the word. Did he ask for it specifically? Also, check Cry, the appraiser. How come the only intact game in the book was 'Sardine?' Peetcy'll want to know. And where's that girl?

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Dodo Wraught, patrol officer now in plainclothes, was going to come through on his big chance with the suave approach. To the manager and staff of Winters, he drawled: "I'm in the market for old game books . . . the kind my very good friend, Ben Reich, asked for last week."

T8 to Reich: I've been peeping around. They're going to check that book you sent Maria.

Reich to T8: Let 'em. I'm covered. I've got to concentrate on that girl.

The manager and staff carefully explained matters at great length in response to Officer Wraught's suave questions. Many clients lost patience and left the store. One sat quietly in a corner, too wrapt in a crystal recording to realize he was left unattended. Nobody knew that Charley $$on was completely tone-deaf.

Powell to staff: Reich apparently found the book accidentally. Stumbled over it while he was looking for a present for the Beaumont. Pass the word. And where's that girl?

In conference with the agency that handled copy for the Sacrament Jumper (the *only* Nulgee Family Air Rocket on the market) Reich came up with a new advertising program.

"You can't sell transportation on an efficiency basis," he said. "People won't buy our Jumper because it's the best piece of machinery for the money. We can tell 'em it's more efficient and cheaper than the D'Courtney product until we're blue in the face. It won't do any good. This bankbook comparison campaign of yours stinks."

"Granted, Mr. Reich," the account man said alertly. "Its scope was out of orbit. Our synthesis was faulty."

"The fact is this," Reich continued. "People always anthropomorphize the products they use. They give them pet names and treat them like family pets. A man won't buy a Jumper if it's merely efficient. He wants to love it."

"Check!" the account man cried. "Your idea has a sense of scope that dwarfs us, Mr. Reich. Now we know who we're rooting for."

"We're going to anthropomorphize our Jumper," Reich said. "Let's find a girl and vote her the Sacrament Jumper Girl. We'll make every consumer identify his Jumper with this girl. When he buys one, he's buying her."

"Check, Mr. Reich. Check!"

"Start an immediate campaign to locate the Jumper Girl. Get every salesman onto it. Comb the city. Give it lots of play in the Pantys and papers. I want the girl to be about twenty-five, five-five, hundred and twenty pounds. Lots of bounce."

"I understand the psychology.

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The Jumper Girl is a Bouncy Girl."

"She ought to be a blonde with dark eyes. Full mouth. Good strong nose. I've had one of my peeper artists prepare a sketch of my idea of the Jumper Girl. Look it over, have it reproduced and passed out to your crew. There's a promotion for the man who locates the girl I have in mind."

T8 to Reich: I've been peeping some more. They're sending a man into Sacrament to dig up something between you and that appraiser, ¢ry.

Reich to T8: Something between me and ¢ry! Powell couldn't be that dumb, could he? Maybe I've been overrating him.

Expense was no object to Alfred Finely, who believed in the disguises of plastic surgery. Freshly equipped with Mongoloid features, he took a job in Sacrament's accounting department and attempted to unearth Reich's financial relations with ¢ry. It never occurred to him that his intent had been thoroughly peeped by Sacrament's Esper Personnel Chief and reported upstairs, and that upstairs was quietly chuckling.

Powell to staff: The idiot was looking for bribery recorded in Sacrament's books! This should lower Reich's opinion of us by fifty per cent; which makes him fifty per cent more vulnerable. Where's that girl?

At the board meeting of "The Hour" (the only round-the-clock paper on Earth, twenty-four editions a day) which was actually a Sacrament house-organ, Reich announced a new charity to be begun at once and publicized immediately.

"We'll call it 'Sanctuary,'" he said. "We offer aid to the submerged millions in the world in their time of crisis. If you've been evicted, bankrupted, terrorized, swindled . . . if you're frightened for any reason and don't know where to turn . . . turn to Sanctuary."

"It's a hell of a promotion," the managing editor said, "but it'll cost like crazy. What's it for?"

"Public relations," Reich snapped. "The D'Courtney crowd's turned itself into the Great White Father. It's time Sacrament took over the role."

Reich left the board room, went down to the street and located a public phone booth. He called Ellery West. "I want a man placed in every Sanctuary office, a full description and photo of every applicant relayed to me as they come in."

"I'm not asking any questions, Ben, but I wish I could peep you on that."

"Suspicious?" Reich snarled.

"Just curious."

"Don't let it kill you."

As Reich left the booth he was

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accosted by a mousy man who wore an air of inept eagerness.

"Oh, Mr. Reich. Lucky I bumped into you. The word just came down about Sanctuary and I thought a human interest interview with the originator of that wonderful charity might—"

Lucky he bumped into him! The man was Quinn, "The Hour's" famous peeper reporter. Probably tailed him down and—*Tenser, said the Tensor. Tenser, said the Tensor. Tension, apprehension and dissension have begun.*

"Was there ever a time when you didn't know where to turn? Were you ever afraid of death or murder? Were—"

Tenser, said the Tensor.

Reich dove into a Public Jumper and escaped.

T8 to Reich: The cops are really after ¢ry. God knows what kind of red herring Powell's following, but it's away from you. I think the safety margin's increasing.

Reich to T8: Not until I've found that girl.

Marcus ¢ry had left no forwarding address and was pursued by Prof. Elias Johnson's "Aural Selector" (a mechanical bloodhound responsive to the particular aura surrounding the human psyche), Dr. E. G. Howard's "Probability Prognosticator" (a mechanical divinator), and Wm. Elgin's "Electrodianetiphore" (a mechanical device defying all description).

The "Aural Selector" ended up in Greenland; the "Probability Prognosticator" broke down in Kimberly; the "Electrodianetiphore" reached Shanghai, and Marcus ¢ry arrived in Moscow where Powell located him at a book auction conducted at breakneck speed by a peeper auctioneer. Powell interviewed ¢ry in the foyer before a window overlooking the remains of Red Square.

Powell to staff: All clear. Reich bought the book, had it appraised, sent it as a gift. The book was in bad condition and the only game Maria could select was 'Sardine.' We'll never pin anything on Reich with that. I know how Peetey's mind works. Damn it, where's that girl?

Three operatives in succession were smitten with Miss Duffy Wyg& and retired in disgrace to don their uniforms once more. When Powell finally reached her, she was at the 4,000 Ball, escorted and patrolled by Sam Jordan who gave her advice and counsel. She elected to talk.

Powell to Staff: I called Ellery West down at Sacrament and he supports her story. West did complain about gambling and Reich bought a psych-song to stop it. He picked up that mind-block by accident. What about that gimmick Reich used on the guards? And what about that girl?

"As far as this strike is con-

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cerned," Reich told the executives of African Mines, Ltd., a subsidiary of Sacrament, "it's my opinion it's a ruse fomented by the D'Courtney gang, and I'm going to throw it back in their teeth."

"I must disagree with you, Mr. Reich. Our attorney has been conferring with the strike committee. He's an Esper, of course. It seems that when the labor union negotiated the contract last year, they failed to express their demands clearly. That failure was a result of their decision not to employ Esper counsel for reasons of economy . . . a decision they now regret. That is the issue. I hardly think that the D'Courtney Cartel is—"

"You're not paid to think. Just listen to me. Tell personnel down at the mines to stage a beauty contest. They're going to elect Barbara D'Courtney the pin-up girl of the African Mines. They'll send a delegation to New York to meet her and make the presentation to her and have a hell of a time; and they'll invite her back for a grand tour. If she accepts, what'll you bet the D'Courtney gang ends the strike?"

T8 to Reich: Powell's still blundering. This time he's after the gimmick you used on D'Courtney's bodyguards. You're perfectly safe. His ideas are crazy.

Reich to T8: I'll get Quizzard to make sure I'm safe on that; but we're not out of this until we get the girl. I've got to get her!

In response to bitter criticism, Commissioner Crabbe revealed that Police Laboratories had discovered a new investigation technique which would break the D'Courtney Case within 24 hours. It involved photomagnetic analysis of the Visual Purple in the corpse's eyes which would yield a picture of the murderer. Rhodopsin researchers were being co-opted by the police.

An anonymous person with a clabbered voice phoned Wilson ¼maine at Central Tech and casually attempted to purchase Dr. ¼maine's interest in the Drake Estate for a small sum. The clabbered voice sounded too crafty to ¼maine (who had never even heard of the Drake Estate) and he called Central's Law School. He was informed that the Drake Estate on Callisto, valued at half a million, had just been reopened for litigation. Dr. ¼maine was a probable legatee. The psychologist jetted for Callisto one hour later.

Powell to staff: Indicating ¼maine might be our man on the Rhodopsin angle. He's the only Visual Physiologist to disappear after Crabbe's announcement. Pass the word to $$en to tail him to Callisto and handle it. What about that girl?

Meanwhile, the slick side of the Rough & Smooth was quietly in operation. As The Gilt Corpse

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was entertaining Reich with her squawking flight, a bright young attorney from Sacrament's legal department was deftly decoyed to Paris and held there anonymously on a valid, if antiquated, vice charge. An astonishing double of that gentleman went to work for him.

T8 to Reich: Check your legal department. I can't peep what's going on, but something's fishy. This is dangerous.

Reich brought in an Esper Efficiency Expert 1, ostensibly for a general checkup, and located the substitution. Then he called the man with the clabbered voice who had multifarious connections. A plaintiff suddenly appeared and sued the bright young attorney for barratry. That ended the substitute's connection with Sacrament painlessly and legitimately.

Powell to staff: We're being licked. Reich's slamming every door in our face . . . . Rough & Smooth. Find out who's doing the legwork for him, and find that girl.

While Alfred Finely was cavorting around Sacrament with his brand-new Mongolian face, one of Sacrament's young scientists, who had been badly hurt in a laboratory explosion, apparently left the hospital a week early and reported back for duty. He was heavily bandaged, but eager for work. It was the old Sacrament spirit.

T8 to Reich: I've finally figured it. Powell isn't dumb. He's running his investigation on two levels. Don't pay any attention to the one that shows. Watch out for the one underneath. I've peeped something about a hospital. Check it.

Reich checked. It took three days and then he called the man with the clabbered voice. Sacrament was burgled of $50,000 in laboratory platinum and the Restricted Room was destroyed in the process. The newly returned scientist was unmasked as an impostor, accused of complicity in the crime and handed over to the police.

Powell to staff: Which means we'll never prove Reich got that Rhodopsin stuff from his own lab. How in God's name did he unslick our trick? Can't we do anything on any level? Where's that girl?

While Reich was laughing at the ludicrous search for Marcus Cry, his top brass was greeting the Continental Tax Examiner, an Esper 2, who had arrived for a long delayed check on Sacrament's books. This despite the fact that Reich owned three Continental Senators. One of the new additions to the Examiner's squad was a peeper ghostwriter who prepared her chief's reports. She was an expert in official work . . . mainly police work.

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T8 to Reich: I'm suspicious of that Examiner's squad. Don't take any chances.

Reich smiled grimly and turned his company books over to the squad. Then he sent Hassop, his Code Chief, to Ampro on that promised vacation. Hassop obligingly carried a small spool of exposed film with his regular photographic equipment. That spool was Sacrament's secret books, cased in a thermite seal which would destroy all records unless it was opened properly. The only other copy was in Reich's invulnerable temporal-phase safe at home.

Powell to staff: And that just about ends everything for us. Have Hassop double-tailed Rough & Smooth. He's probably got vital evidence on him, so Reich's got him beautifully protected. Damn it, we're licked. I say it. Mr. Peetey says it. You know it. Where is that missing girl?

LIKE an anatomical chart of the blood system, colored red for the arterial and blue for the venous, the two networks of the underworld and overworld grapevines spread. From Guild headquarters the word passed to instructors and students, to their families, friends, casual acquaintances. From Quizzard's Casino the word was passed from croupier to gamblers, confidence men, heavy racketeers, hustlers, steerers and suckers.

On Friday morning, Fred Deal, Esper 3, awoke, bathed, breakfasted and departed to his regular job. He was chief guard on the floor of the Mars Exchange Bank in Maiden Lane. Stopping to buy a new commutation ticket at the Pneumatique, he passed the time with Biddy MacNaughton, Esper 3, on duty at the Information Desk. Biddy passed Fred the word about Barbara D'Courtney and Fred memorized the TP picture she flashed him. It was a picture framed in dollar signs.

On Friday morning, Lonzo (Snim) Whittmaker was awakened by his landlady, Chooka Frood, with a loud scream for back rent.

"You already makin' a frabby fortune with 'at loopy yella-head girl you pick up," Snim complained. "You runnin' a golmine withat spook stuff downinna basement. Whaddya want from me?"

Chooka Frood pointed out to Snim that the yellow-headed girl was not crazy. She was a genuine medium. Chooka did not run rackets; she was a legitimate fortuneteller. If Snim did not come through with six weeks roof and rolls, Chooka would be able to tell his fortune without any trouble at all. Snim would be out on the asphalt.

Snim arose. Already dressed, he descended into the city to get himself crowned. He inspected the charity stands he had set up

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on various corners . . . small steel coffers with slots in the top and signs on the side that read: END STARVATION ON CALLISTO. This was Snim's private charity and not very profitable. The coffers were empty.

It was too early to run up to Quizzard's and work the sob on the more prosperous clients, and anyway there had been that tattoo difficulty with Keno. Snim touched his new ear delicately and tried to sneak a ride uptown on the Pneumatique. He was thrown out by the peeper change clerk and walked. It was a long haul to Jerry Church's hockshop, but Snim had a gold and pearl pocket-pianino up there and he was hoping to cadge Church into advancing another sovereign on it He had to get himself crowned today.

Church was absent on business and the clerk could do nothing for Snim. Snim told the sob to the clerk about his landlady crowning herself every day with the new spook-shill she was using in her palm-racket and still trying to milk him when she was rolling. The clerk would not weep even for the price of coffee. Snim departed.

When Jerry Church returned to the hockshop for a brief time-out in his wild quest for Reich, the clerk reported Snim's visit and conversation. What the clerk did not report, Church peeped. He tottered to the phone and called Reich. Reich could not be located. Church called Keno Quizzard.

Meanwhile, Snim was growing a little desperate. He trudged downtown to Maiden Lane and cased the banks in that pleasant esplanade around Bomb Inlet. He was not too bright and made the mistake of selecting the Mars Exchange for a con. It looked dowdy and provincial. Snim had not learned that it is only the powerful and efficient institutions that can afford to look second-rate.

Snim entered the bank, crossed the crowded main floor to the row of desks opposite the tellers' cages, and stole a handful of deposit slips and a pen. As Snim left the bank, Fred Deal glanced at him once, motioned wearily to his staff, then pointed to Snim who was disappearing through the front door.

"He's getting ready to pull the 'Adjustment' routine. Let him go ahead with it. We'll pick him up after he's got the money and get a conviction."

Unaware of this, Snim lurked outside the bank, watching the tellers' cages closely. A citizen was making a big withdrawal at Cage Z. This was the fish. Snim hastily removed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and tucked the pen in his ear. As the fish came out of the bank, counting his money,

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Snim slipped behind him, darted up and tapped the man's shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir," he said briskly. "I'm from Cage Z. I'm afraid our teller made a mistake and shortcounted you. Will you come back for the adjustment, please?"

Snim waved his sheaf of slips, swept the money from the fish's fins and turned to enter the bank. As the surprised citizen followed him, Snim slipped into the crowd and headed for the side exit. He would be out and away before the fish realized he'd been skinned.

It was at this moment that a rough hand grasped Snim's neck. He was swung around face to face with a bank guard. In one chaotic instant, Snim contemplated fight, flight, bribery, pleas, Kingston Hospital, the bitch Chooka Frood and her yellow-headed ghost girl, his pocket-pianino and a man named Strenn who owned it. Then he collapsed and wept.

The guard flung him to another uniform and shouted: "Take him, boys. I've just made myself a mint!"

"Is there a reward for this little guy, Fred?"

"Not for him. For what's in his head. I've got to call the Guild."

At nearly the same moment late Friday afternoon, Ben Reich and Preston Powell received the identical information:

"Girl answering to the description of Barbara D'Courtney can be found in Chooka Frood's Fortune Act, 99 Bastion West Side."

X

FAMOUS last bulwark in the Siege of New York, Bastion West Side was a war memorial. Its ten torn acres were to have been maintained in perpetuity as a denunciation of the insanity that produced the final war. But the final war, as usual, proved to be the next-to-the final. Number 99 was an evicerated ceramics plant. A succession of blazing explosions had burst among the stock of thousands of chemical glazes, fused them, and splashed them into a wild splotchy reproduction of a Lunar crater. This was the Rainbow House of Chooka Frood.

The top floors had been patched and subdivided into a warren of cells so complicated and confused that a man could slip from cell to cell while the floors were being searched, and easily evade the most painstaking cordon. This unusual complexity netted Chooka large profits each year.

The lower floors were given over to Chooka's famous Frab Joint, where vice was served to order, either grossly or subtly.

But the cellar of Chooka Frood's house was the phenomenon that had inspired her most lucrative industry. It was worth

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the hazardous trip to Bastion West Side. You threaded your way through twisting streets until you reached the streak of jagged orange that pointed to the door of Chooka's Rainbow House. At the door you were met by an obscenely solemn person in XXth Century formal costume who asked: "Frab or Fortune?" You replied "Fortune" and were conducted to a sepulchral door where you paid a gigantic fee and were handed a phosphor candle. Holding the candle aloft, you walked down a deep stone staircase.

Around the rim of the cellar, on stone benches, sat the other future-seekers, each holding his phosphor candle. You joined the throbbing, burning silence and sat quietly, your candle joining the constellation of stars, until at last there came the high chime of a silver bell.

Clothed in a cascade of flaming music, Chooka Frood entered the cellar and paced to the center of the floor.

"And there, of course, the illusion ends," Powell said to himself. He stared at Chooka's potato nose, flat eyes. "Maybe she can act," he muttered hopefully.

Chooka stopped in the middle of the floor, looking much like a frowzy Medusa, then lifted her arms in what was intended for a sweeping mystic gesture.

"She can't," Powell decided.

"I am come here to you," Chooka intoned in a hoarse voice, "to help you look into the deeps of your hearts. Look down into your hearts, you which are looking for revenge on a man named Zerlan from Mars . . . for the love of a red-eyed woman of Callisto . . . for the wealth of that stingy uncle in Paris . . ."

"Why, damn me! The woman's a peeper!"

Chooka stiffened. Her mouth hung open.

"You're receiving me, aren't you, Chooka Frood?"

The answer came in frightened fragments. It was obvious that Chooka Frood's natural ability had never been trained. *"Who? Which is . . . you?"*

As carefully as if he were communicating with an infant 3rd, Powell spelled it out: *"Name—Preston Powell. Occupation—Police Prefect. Intent—to question a girl named Barbara D'Courtney. I have heard she's participating in your act."* Powell transmitted a picture of the girl.

It was pathetic the way Chooka tried to block. *"Get . . . out! Out of here!"*

"Why haven't you come to the Guild? Why aren't you in contact with your own people?"

"Goddam peeper. Get out."

"You're a goddam peeper, too. Why haven't you let us train you? What kind of life is this for you? There's real work waiting for you, Chooka."

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"Real money?"

Powell repressed the wave of exasperation that rose up in him. It was not exasperation with Chooka. It was anger at the relentless force of progress and evolution that insisted on endowing man with increased powers without removing the vestigial vices that prevented him from using them.

"We'll talk about that later, Chooka. Where's the girl?"

"There is no girl."

"Peep the customers with me. That old goat obsessed with the red-eyed woman . . ." Powell explored gently. *"He's been here before. He's waiting for Barbara D'Courtney to come in. You dress her in sequins. You bring her on after about half an hour. He likes her looks. She does some kind of trance routine to music. Her dress is slit open to the thigh and he likes that."*

"He's crazy. I never—"

"And the woman who was loused by a man named Zerlan? She's seen the girl often, believes in her. Where's the girl, Chooka?"

"No!"

"I see. Upstairs. Where upstairs, Chooka? You can't misdirect a 1st. Maybe if you'd let the Guild train you — fourth room on the left of the angle turn. That's a complicated labyrinth you've got up there, Chooka. Let's have it once again to make sure . . ."

Helpless and mortified, Chooka suddenly shrieked: "Get out of here, you lousy cop!"

"Excuse it, please," said Powell. "I'm on my way."

He arose and left the room.

THAT entire investigation occurred within the second it took Reich to step from the eighteenth to the nineteenth step on his way down to Chooka Frood's rainbow cellar. Reich heard Chooka's furious screech and Powell's reply. He turned and shot up the stairs to the main floor.

As he jostled past the door attendant, he thrust a sovereign into the man's hand and hissed: "I wasn't here. Understand?"

"No one is ever here, sir."

He made a quick circuit of the Frab rooms. *Tension, apprehension and dissension have begun.* He brushed by the girls and other creatures who solicited him, then locked himself into the phone booth and punched BD-12,232. Church's anxious face appeared on the screen.

"We're in a jam. Powell's here."

"Oh, my God!"

"Where in hell is Quizzard?"

"I thought he'd be there."

"Powell was in the cellar, peeping Chooka. You can bet Quizzard wasn't there. Where in hell is he?"

"I don't know, Ben. He went down with his wife and—"

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"Powell must have located the girl. I've got maybe five minutes to beat him to her. Quizzard was supposed to do that for me."

"He must be upstairs in the coop."

"Is there a quick way to get up to the coop? A shortcut I can use to beat Powell to her?"

"If Powell peeped Chooka, he peeped the shortcut."

"Maybe he didn't. Maybe he was concentrating on the girl. It's a chance I'll have to take."

"Behind the main stairs. There's a marble bas-relief. Turn the woman's head to the right. The bodies separate and there's a door to a vertical pneumatique."

Reich hung up, left the booth, found the bas-relief, twisted the woman's head savagely and watched the bodies swing apart. A steel door appeared. He yanked the door open and stepped into the open shaft. Instantly a metal plate jolted up against his soles and with a hiss of air pressure he was lofted to the top floor. A magnetic catch held the plate while he opened the shaft door and stepped out of the pneumatique.

He found himself in a corridor that slanted up at an angle of thirty degrees and leaned to the left. It was floored with canvas. The ceiling glowed at intervals with small flickering globes of radon. The walls were lined with doors, none of them numbered.

"Quizzard!" Reich shouted.

There was no answer.

Reich ran halfway up the corridor, and then at a venture tried a door. It opened to a narrow cubby entirely filled with an oval bed. Reich crawled across the foam mattress to a door on the opposite side, thrust it open and fell through. He found himself on a landing. A flight of steps led down to a round anteroom rimmed with doors.

"Quizzard!" he shouted again.

There was a muffled reply. Reich spun on his heels, ran to a door and pulled it open. A woman with eyes dyed red by plastic surgery was standing just inside and Reich blundered against her. She burst into unaccountable laughter. Reich backed away, reached for the door, apparently missed it and seized the knob of another, for he did not come out into the circular foyer.

He found himself staring up into the angry face of Chooka Frood.

"What the hell are you doing in my room?" Chooka screamed.

Reich shot to his feet. "Where is she?"

"Get out of here, Ben Reich."

"Barbara D'Courtney — where is she?"

Chooka turned her head and yelled: "Magda!"

The red-eyed woman came into the room. She held a TP scram-

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bler in her hand and she was still laughing; but the gun was trained on his skull.

"I want the girl, Chooka, before Powell gets her."

"Get him out of here, Magda!"

Reich clubbed the woman across the eyes with the back of his hand. She fell backward, dropping the gun, and into a corner, still laughing. Reich ignored her. He picked up the scrambler and aimed it at Chooka's temple.

"Where's the girl?"

"You go to hell!"

Reich pulled the trigger back into first notch. The radiation charged Chooka's nervous system with a low induction current. She stiffened and began to tremble, but she still shook her head. Reich yanked the trigger back to second notch. Chooka's body was thrown into a break-bone ague.

"Third notch is death notch," he growled. "Where is she?"

Chooka was almost completely paralyzed. "Through . . . door," she croaked. "Fourth room . . . left . . . after turn."

Reich dropped her and let her fall in a heap alongside the laughing red-eyed woman. He ran out of the bedroom, came to a corkscrewed ramp. He mounted it, took a sharp turn, stopped at the fourth room on the left. He thrust open the door and entered. There was an empty bed, a single dresser, an empty closet, a single chair.

"Gulled!" he snarled.

The bed showed no sign of use. Neither did the closet. He yanked at a dresser drawer that was partly open. It contained a frost white silk gown and a stained steel object that looked like a malignant flower. It was the murder weapon.

"My God!" Reich breathed.

He snatched up the gun and inspected it. Its chambers still contained the cartridges without slugs. The one that had blown the top of Craye D'Courtney's head out was still in place under the hammer.

"It isn't Demolition yet," Reich muttered. "Not by a damned sight." He folded up the revolver and thrust it into his pocket. At that moment he heard a distant clabbered laugh. Quizzard's laugh.

Reich stepped quickly to the twisted ramp and followed the sound of the laughter to a plush door hung on brass hinges and set deep in the wall. Gripping the scrambler at the alert with the trigger set for Death Notch, Reich pulled open the door.

He was in a small round room, walled and ceilinged in midnight velvet. The floor was a one-way mirror that gave a clear uninterrupted view of a boudoir on the floor below. It was Chooka's Voyeur Chamber.

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In the boudoir, Quizzard sat in a deep chair, his blind eyes blazing. The D'Courtney girl was perched on his lap, wearing an astonishing slit gown of sequins, evidently the costume the girl wore for Chooka's fortune act. She sat quietly, her yellow hair smooth, her deep dark eyes staring placidly into space.

"How does she look?" Quizzard asked a small faded woman who stood across the boudoir from him, with her back against the wall and an incredible expression of agony on her face. It was Quizzard's wife.

"Lost," his wife answered in a faint voice. "Dead."

Quizzard fumbled for the girl's head and drew it down. He kissed her passive mouth.

"She doesn't look dead now, does she?"

"She doesn't know what's happening."

"She knows," Quizzard shouted. "She isn't that far gone. If I only had my eyes!"

"I'm your eyes, Keno."

"Then look for me. Tell me!"

Reich cursed and aimed the scrambler at Quizzard's head. Then Powell entered the boudoir. The woman saw him at once.

"Run, Keno! Run!"

She thrust herself from the wall and darted toward Powell, her hands clawing for his eyes. Then she fell prone and never moved. As Quizzard surged up from the

chair with the girl in his arms, his blind eyes staring, Reich came to the appalled conclusion that the woman's fall was no accident; for Quizzard suddenly dropped. The girl tumbled out of his arms and fell into the chair.

There was no doubt that Powell had accomplished this on a TP level, and for the first time in their war Reich was physically afraid. Again he aimed the scrambler, this time at Powell's head as the peeper walked to the chair.

Powell said, "Are you all right, Miss D'Courtney?" When the girl failed to answer, he bent down and stared into her blank, placid face. He touched her arm and

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repeated: "Are you all right? Do you need help?"

At the word "help" the girl whipped upright in the chair in a listening attitude. Then she thrust out her legs and leaped from the chair. She ran past Powell in a straight line, stopped abruptly and reached out as though grasping a doorknob. She thrust an imaginary door open and burst forward, yellow hair flying, dark eyes wide with alarm . . . a lightning flash of wild beauty.

"Father!" she screamed. "For God's sake! Father!"

She ran forward, stopped short and backed away. She darted to the left, stopped and struggled with imaginary arms that held her. She fought and screamed, her eyes still fixed, then stiffened and clapped her hands to her ears as though a violent sound had pierced them. She fell forward to her knees and crawled. Then she stopped, snatched at something on the floor, and remained crouched on her knees.

With sickening certainty, Reich knew she had relived the death of her father. She had relived it for Powell. And if he had peeped her . . .

Powell went to the girl and raised her from the floor. She arose as gracefully as a dancer, as serenely as a somnambulist. The peeper put his arm around her and took her to the door. Reich followed him all the way with the muzzle of the scrambler, waiting for the best shooting angle. He was invisible. He could win safety with a shot. Powell opened the door, then suddenly looked up.

"Go ahead," Powell called. "One shot for the both of us. Go ahead!" He stared up at the invisible Reich, waiting, hating, daring.

Reich turned his face away from the man who could not see him.

Powell took the docile girl through the door and closed it quietly behind him, and Reich knew he had permitted safety to slip through his fingers.

XI

CONCEIVE of a camera with a lens distorted so that it can only photograph over and over the scene that twisted it into shock. Conceive of a bit of recording crystal, traumatically warped so that it can only hear the same terrifying phrase.

"She's in hysterical recall," Dr. Johnny Jeems of Kingston Hospital explained to Powell and Mary Noyes in the living room of Powell's house. "She responds to the key word 'help' and relives one experience . . ."

"The death of her father," Powell said.

"Oh? I see. Outside of that

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. . . catatonia."

"Permanent?" Mary Noyes asked.

Jeems looked surprised and indignant. He was one of the brighter young men of Kingston Hospital and fanatically devoted to his work. "In this day and age? Nothing is permanent except death, Miss Noyes, and up at Kingston we've started working on that. Investigating death from the nosogenic point of view, we've actually—"

"Later, Johnny," Powell interrupted. "No lectures tonight. Can I peep her?"

Jeems considered. "No reason why not. I gave her the Deja Eprouve Series for catatonia. That shouldn't get in the way."

"What's the Deja Eprouve Series?" Mary asked.

"A great new treatment," Jeems said excitedly. "Patient goes into catatonia. It's flight from reality. The conscious mind wishes it had never been born. It attempts to revert back to the foetal stage. You understand?"

Mary nodded. "So far."

"We use Deja Eprouve. That's psychiatric French for 'something already experienced, already tried.' Many patients, on the basis of the wish, feel that an act of experience in which they never engaged has happened. We synthesize this Deja Eprouve for the patient. We send the conscious mind back to the womb and let it pretend it's being born all over again. We make the catatonic wish come true. Got that?"

"Got it."

"On the surface, consciously, the patient goes through development all over again at an accelerated rate . . . infancy, childhood, adolescence and finally, maturity."

"You mean Barbara D'Courtney is going to be a baby, learn to speak, walk?"

"Right. Takes about three weeks. By the time she catches up with herself, she'll be ready to accept the reality she's trying to escape. She'll have grown up to it, so to speak. This is only on the conscious level. Below that, she won't be touched. You can peep her all you like. Only trouble is she must be pretty scared down there. You'll have trouble getting what you want. Of course, that's your specialty. You'll know what to do."

Jeems stood up abruptly. "Got to get back to the shop." He made for the front door. "Always delighted to be called in by peepers. I can't understand the recent hostility toward you people . . ." He was gone.

"That was a significant parting note."

"What'd he mean, Pres?"

"Peepers haven't been doing business with enough normals. We keep to ourselves too much. That starts economic pressures

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and prejudices. Have to bring that up in Council later. Bring Barbara down, Mary."

Mary brought the girl downstairs and seated her on the low severe dais. (Powell had recently reconverted his decor to XXth Century Swedish.) Barbara sat like a calm statue. Mary had dressed her in blue leotards and combed her blonde hair back, tying it into a fox-tail with a blue ribbon.

"Lovely outside; mangled inside. Damn Reich!"

"What about him?"

"I was so mad at Chooka Frood's coop, I handed it to that red slug Quizzard and his wife."

"What did you do to Quizzard?"

"Basic neuro-shock. Come up to the Lab sometime and we'll show you. If you make 1st, we'll teach you. It's like the scrambler, but psychogenic."

"Fatal?"

"Forgotten the Pledge? Of course not."

"And you peeped Reich through the floor? How?"

"TP reflection. The Voyeur Chamber wasn't wired for sound. It had open acoustical ducts. Reich's mistake. He was transmitting down the channel and I swear I was hoping he had the guts to shoot. I was going to blast him with a Basic that would have made case history."

"Why didn't he shoot?"

"He had every reason to kill us. He thought he was safe, didn't know about the Basic, even though Quizzard's Decline & Fall jolted him. But he couldn't."

"Afraid?"

"Reich's no coward. He just couldn't. Unconscious inhibition of some sort, but I don't know what. Maybe next time it'll be different. That's why I'm keeping Barbara D'Courtney in my house. This is one place where she'll be safe."

"She'll be safe in Kingston Hospital."

"But not quiet enough for the work I've got to do."

"?"

"She's got the detailed picture of the murder locked up in her hysteria. When I've got it, I've got Reich."

Mary arose. *"Exit Mary Noyes."*

"Sit down, peeper! Why d'you think I called you?"

"No, you don't Mr. Powell." Mary burst into laughter. *"So that's it. You want me for a chaperone. Victorian word, isn't? So are you, Pres. Positively atavistic."*

"I brand that as a lie. I'm known as the most progressive—"

"And what's that image? Knights of the Round Table. Sir Galahad Powell. And there's something underneath that. I—" Suddenly she stopped laughing and turned pale.

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"What'd you dig?"

"Forget it, Pres. And don't peep me for it. If you can't reach it yourself, you'd better not get it second-hand. Especially from me."

He looked at her curiously for a moment. *"All right, Mary. Then we'd better go to work."* To Barbara D'Courtney he said: "Help, Barbara."

Instantly she whipped upright on the dais in a listening attitude, and he probed delicately . . . Sensation of bedclothes . . . Voice calling dimly . . . *"Whose voice, Barbara?"* Deep in the preconscious she answered: "Who is that?" *"A friend, Barbara."* "There's no one. No one. I'm alone." And she was alone, racing down a corridor to thrust a door open and burst into an orchid room to see—*"What, Barbara?"* "A man. Two men." *"Who?"* "Go away. Please go away. I don't like voices. There's a voice screaming in my ears . . ."

She was screaming while terror made her dodge from a dim figure that clutched at her to keep her from her father. *"What is your father doing, Barbara?"* "He—no, you don't belong here. There's only the three of us. Father and me and—" A flash of the face. *"Look again, Barbara. Sleek head. Wide eyes. Small straight nose. Small sensitive mouth. Like a scar. Is that the man? Look at the picture. Is that the man?"* "Yes. Yes." And then all was gone.

She was kneeling again, placid, doll-like.

Powell wiped perspiration from his face and took the girl back to the dais. Hysteria cushioned the emotional impact for her. He was reliving her terror, naked and unprotected.

"It was Ben Reich, Mary. Did you get the picture, too?"

"Couldn't stay in long enough, Pres. Had to run for cover."

"It was Reich, all right. Only question is, how in hell did he kill her father? What did he use? Why didn't old D'Courtney put up a fight to defend himself? Have to try again. I hate to do this to her . . ."

"I hate you to do this to yourself, Pres."

"Have to." He took a deep breath and said: "Help, Barbara."

Again she whipped upright on the dais in a listening attitude. *"Not so fast. There's plenty of time."* "You again?" *"Remember me, Barbara?"* "No, I don't know you. Get out." *"But I'm part of you, Barbara. We're running down the corridor together. See? We're opening the door together. It's so much easier together. We help each other."* "We?" *"Yes, Barbara, you and I. When you talk to yourself when you're alone, you talk to me. That's who I am."* "Look at father! For pity's

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sake, help me!"

She knelt again, placid, doll-like.

Powell felt a hand under his arm and realized he was not supposed to be kneeling too. The body before him slowly disappeared, the orchid room disappeared; and Mary Noyes was straining to raise him.

"You first this time," she said grimly. He shook his head. *"All right, Sir Galahad. Cool a while."*

Mary raised the girl and led her to the dais. Then she returned to Powell. *"Ready for help now, or don't you think it's manly?"*

"The word is virile. Don't waste your time trying to help me up. I need brain power."

"What'd you peep?"

"D'Courtney wanted to be murdered."

"The hell you say!"

"The hell I don't. I've got to see D'Courtney's M.D. first thing in the morning."

SAM @kins, E.M.D. 1, received $1,000 per hour of analysis, two million dollars per year, but Sam was efficiently killing himself with charity work. He was one of the burning lights of the Guild's long-range education plan, and leader of the Environment Clique which believed that telepathic ability was not a congenital characteristic, but a latent quality which could be developed by suitable training.

He invited everyone in the low income brackets to bring their problems to him, and while he was ironing them out he was carefully attempting to foster telepathy in his patients. So far, the results had been the discovery of 2% Latent Espers, which was under the average of the Guild Institute interviews, but Sam was undiscouraged.

Powell found him charging through the garden, vigorously destroying flowers under the impression that he was cultivating. He was snorting and shouting at plants and patients alike.

"Damn it, don't you tell me that's a zinnia. Don't I know a weed when I see it? Hand me the rake, Bernard."

A small man in black handed him the rake and said: "My name is Walter, Dr. @kins."

@kins grunted, tearing out a clump of green that was neither weed nor zinnia, but marigold. "Why in hell are you running away from Bernard? Who taught you that semantic loophole?"

"I was hoping you'd tell me, Dr. @kins," Walter replied.

"You remind me of Alice Bright. Where is that make-believe slut anyway?"

A pretty red-headed girl jostled through the crowd and smirked; "Here I am, Dr. @kins."

"Well, don't preen yourself because I called you a name." @kins

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frowned at her and continued on the TP level: "*'I'm a woman,' you tell yourself. 'Therefore, men desire me. It's enough to know that thousands of men could have me if I'd let them. That makes me real.' Well, it doesn't. It's no substitute for living—nothing is.*"

@kins waited impatiently for a response, but the girl merely postured before him. Finally he burst out: "*Didn't any of you hear what I told her?*"

"*I did, teacher.*"

"*Oh, you. Hi, Pres. How about this crowd of dead heads? Too lazy to peep a simple question.*"

"*Lay off that plant, Sam. It's a tomato.*"

"*It's a weed.*"

"*Sam, you busted botany our first year. I'm telling you it's tomato.*" Powell turned to the patients. "What kind of plant is that?"

"Tomato," they said.

Sam pulled it up. "I'm allergic to tomatoes," he announced with an air of having had the final word. "*What's on your mind, Pres?*"

"*When you get a chance I'd like to ask a couple of questions about a dead patient.*"

"*Who?*"

"*D'Courtney. Our Mr. Peetcy is very curious about him.*"

"*Oh. Give me another half hour with my flock. Say, young Chervil's here, waiting to see me too. Anything wrong in the family? He seemed real upset. Go talk to him.*"

Powell let out a blast: "*CHERVIL!*"

One of @kins' flock flinched and Sam turned on the man excitedly. "You heard that, didn't you, Hopkins?"

"No, sir. I didn't hear nothing."

"Then why did you jump?"

"A bug bit me."

"It did not!" @kins roared. "There are no bugs in my garden. You heard Mr. Powell."

Young Gally Chervil answered from the house and Powell left the garden. @kins yelled after him: "Powell, you've discovered the answer. We've got to yell loud enough for these lazybones." And then he began a frightful racket: "*YOU CAN ALL HEAR ME. DON'T SAY YOU CAN'T.*"

Powell found young Gally pacing distractedly before the French windows facing the garden. He looked up gloomily. "*Hi, Mr. Powell.*"

"*Pip, Gally.*"

"*Pop, Mr. Powell. Also Bim, Bam and* (censored)."

From the garden @kins complained: "*Stop broadcasting. You're jamming the band. Talk.*"

Powell grinned. "How you fixed for words, Gally?"

"They fail me."

"Trouble?"

Gally nodded. "You believe Dr. @kins?"

"Not about flowers."

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"I mean his idea about everybody being an Esper."

"We'd all like to believe him. He hasn't convinced anybody yet."

"He's got to be right," Gally muttered. "That girl I met at the Beaumont party the night D'Courtney was killed—"

"Duffy Wyg&? What about her?"

Gally burst out: "I'm going to marry her."

"Oh? She isn't a peeper."

"Dr. @kins says everybody is."

"Moral support, eh?"

"Are you against it, Mr. Powell?"

"The Guild is, Gally. You know why. Sam @kins is wrong. Guild statistics show that when peepers marry non-peepers, few of their children are peepers. It's like blue eyes . . . a recessive inherited characteristic. We can't take a chance on losing it."

"That's the Guild answer, Mr. Powell, but I asked you. Are you against it?"

"She's a lovely girl, Gally. Sharp, smart, talented. That's why I'm against it."

"That's why?"

"For her sake, not yours. Peepers have married outside. The marriages always fail because they aren't based on equality. Living with a peeper makes an outsider feel crippled. Duffy Wyg& would end up hating you, loathing herself; no longer sharp, smart, talented, lovely. If you love her, Gally, don't destroy her. Let her go."

@kins came bouncing into the room. *"It's a great discovery, Powell. Sensational. They heard me. My brains are hoarse, but, by God, they heard me."*

"How many specific responses did you get?"

"Well, none, but that's because they're stubborn. Ashamed to be peepers. Now, Gally, what's with you? Spit it out. I've got a schedule."

Young Chervil hesitated. The TP band crackled with blocks, releases and adjustments. Finally it came: *"Nothing in particular, sir. Just a friendly call."*

"Friendly? Then why that expression?"

After Gally had evaded the question and left, Powell painted the picture. @kins was properly apologetic, but unimpressed by Chervil's courage. Fifteen years of happy marriage make a man unsympathetic to the trials of callow romance.

"He'll fall in love with a peeper and live happily ever after. Now what's with D'Courtney?"

Powell presented the problem. Reich had definitely murdered D'Courtney. Powell did not know why or how, but one point was clear and perplexing and would have to be cleared up for Mr. Peetcy. Reich had thrust the murder weapon into D'Courtney's

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mouth and blown out the back of his head with it. That was virtually impossible with the killer struggling with the daughter on one hand and the victim on the other . . . unless the victim was not trying to defend himself.

"I see. The answer is yes. He was probably happy to die."

"How? Why?"

"He was regressing under emotional exhaustion and on the verge of suicide. He came here from his home on Mars only because I raised such a fuss that it was easier for him to give in. Reich's little gift must have come as a welcome surprise."

"Why was D'Courtney set on suicide?"

"If I knew, he wouldn't have been. Reich turned my case into a failure. I could have saved D'Courtney."

"You made any guesses why D'Courtney's pattern was crumbling?"

"Yes. He was trying to take drastic action to escape a deep guilt."

"Guilt about what?"

"His child."

"Barbara? How? Why?"

"I don't know. He was fighting symbols of abandonment, desertion, shame, loathing, cowardice. We were going to work on that. That's all I know."

"Could Reich have figured and counted on all this? That's something Mr. Peetcy is going to fuss about."

"He might have guessed—impossible. He'd need expert help to—"

"Hold it, Sam. You've got something hidden under that. I'd like to get it if I can . . ."

"Go ahead. I'm wide open."

"Easy now . . . Association with festivity . . . Party . . . Conversation at my party. Last month. Gus T8, an expert himself, but needing help on a similar patient of his own, he said. If T8 needed help, you reasoned Reich certainly would need help." Powell was so upset he spoke aloud. "Well, how about that, peeper?"

"How about what?"

"Gus T8 was at the Beaumont party the night D'Courtney was killed. He came with Reich, but I kept hoping—"

"Pres, I don't believe it!"

"Neither did I, but there it is. Little Gus was Reich's expert. He pumped you and turned it over to a killer. What price the Galen Pledge now?"

"What price Demolition?" @kins answered fiercely.

From somewhere inside the house came an announcement from Sally @kins: *"Pres. Phone."*

Powell loped down a hall toward the phone alcove. He saw $$on's face on the screen.

"Lucky I caught you, boss. We've got six hours."

"Take it from the top, $$on."

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"Your Rhodopsin man, Dr. Wilson ¼maine, is back from Callisto. Now a man of property by courtesy of Ben Reich. I came back with him. He's in town for six hours to settle his affairs, and then he rockets back to Callisto to live on his new estate forever."

"Damn this phone. Who can get a picture with words? Will ¼maine talk?"

"Would I call you if he would? He's grateful to Reich who (I am now quoting) generously stepped out of the legal picture in favor of Dr. ¼maine and justice. If you want anything, bring your grapnel."

"AND this," Powell said, "is our Guild Laboratory, Dr. ¼maine."

¼maine was impressed. The entire top floor of the Guild building was devoted to laboratory research. It was a circular floor, almost a thousand feet in diameter, domed with a double layer of controlled quartz that could give graded illumination from full to total darkness, including monochrome light to within one-tenth of an angstrom.

"I haven't much time, Mr. Powell," ¼maine said.

"Of course not. Very kind of you to give us an hour. That may be enough for you to help us."

"Anything to do with D'Courtney?" ¼maine asked.

"Who? Oh, the murder. Whatever put that into your mind?"

"I've been hounded," ¼maine said grimly.

"We're asking for research guidance, not information on a murder case. What's murder to a scientist?"

¼maine relaxed a little. "Very true. You have only to look at this laboratory to realize that. And I won't be peeped?"

"Dr. ¼maine," Powell said in hurt tones. "I gave you the word of a scientist."

"Of course." ¼maine pointed to a bench. "What's all that? Symbiosis?"

"Let's have a look, shall we?" Powell took ¼maine's arm. To the entire laboratory he broadcast: *"Stand by, peepers! Here's a guy that's got to be buttered. He specializes in visual physiology and he's got information I want him to volunteer. Kindly fake all kinds obscure-type visual problems and beg for help."*

They came by in droves. A researcher, actually working on a problem of a transitor which would record the TP impulse, hastily invented the fact that TP transmission was monochrome and humbly requested enlightenment. A pair of pretty girls, engrossed in the infuriating dead-end of long-range telepathic transmission, demanded of Dr. ¼maine why transmission of visual images always fell off ten angstroms, which it did not. The

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Japanese team, experts on the Galen Node, center of TP perceptivity, insisted that the Galen Node was in circuit with the Optic Synapse (it wasn't within two centimeters of same) and besieged Dr. ¼maine with specious proofs.

At 1:00 P. M., Powell said: "I'm sorry to interrupt, but your hour is finished and you've got important business to—"

"Quite all right," ¼maine interrupted. "Now, my dear doctor, if you would try a transection of the optic—"

At 2:00, a buffet luncheon was served without interrupting the feast of reason. Dr. ¼maine, flushed and ecstatic, confessed that he loathed the idea of being rich on Callisto. No scientists there. He also confided to Powell how he had inherited his estate. Seemed that Craye D'Courtney originally owned it. The old Reich (Ben's father) must have swindled it one way or another, and placed it in his wife's name. When she died, it went to her son. Ben Reich must have had conscience qualms, for he threw it into open court, and Wilson ¼maine somehow came up with it.

"And he must have plenty more on his conscience," ¼maine said. "The things I saw when I worked for him! But all these financiers are crooks. You agree?"

"I disagree about Ben Reich," Powell replied, striking the noble note. "I admire him very much."

"Of course," ¼maine agreed hastily. "After all, he does have a conscience."

Powell became a fellow-conspirator and captivated ¼maine with a grin. "As fellow scientists we can deplore; but as men of the world we can only praise."

"You *do* understand." ¼maine shook Powell's hand effusively.

At 4:00, Dr. ¼maine informed the polite Japanese that he would gladly volunteer his most secret work on Visual Purple, in effect, handing on the torch to the next generation. His eyes moistened and his throat choked with sentiment as he spent twenty minutes carefully describing the Rhodopsin Ionizer he had developed for Sacrament.

At 5:00, the Guild scientists escorted Dr. ¼maine by launch to his Callisto rocket. They filled his stateroom with gifts and flowers; they filled his ears with grateful testimonials, and he took off with the pleasant conviction that he had materially benefited science and never betrayed that fine, generous patron, Mr. Benjamin Reich.

BARBARA was in the living room on all fours, crawling energetically. She had just been fed and her face was eggy.

"Hajaja," she said. "Haja."

"Mary! Come quick! She's

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talking! Barbara's talking!"

"*No!*" Mary ran in from the kitchen. "*What'd she say?*"

"*She called me dada.*"

"Haja," said Barbara.

Mary blasted him with scorn. "*She said haja.*" She returned to the kitchen.

"*She meant dada. Is it her fault if she's too young to articulate?*" Powell knelt alongside Barbara. "Say dada, baby. Dada?"

"Haja," Barbara replied with an enchanting drool.

Powell gave it up. He went down past the conscious level to the preconscious.

"*Hello, Barbara.*"

"You again?"

"*Remember me? I'm the guy that pries into your private little turmoil down here. We fight it out together.*"

"Just the two of us?"

"*Just the two of us. Do you know who you are? Would you like to know why you're buried way down here in this solitary existence?*"

"Tell me."

"*You were born. You had a mother and a father. You grew up into a lovely girl with blonde hair and dark eyes and a graceful figure. You traveled from Mars to Earth with your father and you were—*"

"No. There's no one but you."

"*I'm really sorry, but we must go through the agony again.*"

"I don't know what you mean, but please . . . please! Just the two of us alone together in the darkness."

"*There was your father in the other room, the orchid room, and suddenly we heard something . . .*" Powell took a deep breath and cried: "Help, Barbara!"

Sensation of bedclothes. Cool floor under running feet and the endless corridor until at last they burst through the door into the orchid room and screamed and dodged the startled grasp of Ben Reich while he raised something to Father's mouth. Raised what? Hold that image. Photograph it. Christ! That horrible muffled explosion. The worshipped figure crumpling unbelievably. They moaned and crawled across the floor to snatch a malignant steel flower from the waxen—

Powell found himself dragged to his feet by Mary Noyes. The air was crackling with indignation.

"*Can't I leave you alone for a minute?*"

"*What's the time, Mary?*"

"*9:40. I came in and found you two kneeling there.*" *Image of angry fists.*

"*I know. But I got what I was after. It was a gun, Mary. Ancient explosive weapon. Clear picture. Take a look . . .*"

"*Where'd he get it? Museum?*"

"*I don't think so. I'm going to play a long shot, kill two birds.*"

Powell lurched to the phone and

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dialed BD-12,232. Presently, Jeremy Church's twisted face appeared on the screen.

"Hi, Jerry."

"Hello, Powell." Cautious. Guarded.

"Did Gus T8 buy a gun from you, Jerry?"

"Gun?"

"Explosive weapon. XXth Century style. Used in the D'Courtney murder."

"No!"

"Yes! I think Gus T8 is our killer, Jerry. Mr. Peetcy thinks so too. I'd like to bring the picture of the gun over and check if he bought it from you." Powell hesitated and then stressed the next words gently: "It'd be a big help, Jerry, and I'll be extremely appreciative. Extremely. Wait for me. I'll be over in half an hour."

Powell hung up. He looked at Mary. Image of an eye winking. *"That ought to give little Gus time to hustle over."*

"Why Gus? When did Peetcy come up with that notion? I thought Ben Reich was—" She caught the picture Powell had sketched in at @kins' house. *"I see. Church sold the gun to Reich."*

"Maybe. He does run a hockshop, and that's next thing to a museum."

"So you're playing T8 and Church against each other."

"And both against Reich. We've failed on the objective level. From here on it's got to be peeper tricks."

"But suppose you can't play them against Reich. What if they call Reich in?"

"They can't. We started Keno Quizzard running for his life, and Reich's out somewhere trying to cut him off and gag him."

"You really are a thief, Pres!"

"Why, thank you, Mary. That's a lovely compliment."

XII

THE pawnshop was in darkness. A single limited-radiation lamp burned on the counter, sending out its sphere of soft light to a radius of two feet. As the three men spoke, they leaned in and out of the illumination.

"No," Powell said sharply. "You two peepers may consider it an insult to have words addressed to you. I consider it evidence of good faith. While I'm talking, I'm not peeping."

Not necessarily, T8 answered. His gnome face popped into the light. "You've been known to finesse, Powell."

"Not now. What I want from you two, I want objectively. I'm working on a murder. Peeping isn't going to do me any good."

"What do you want, Powell?" Church cut in.

"I know you didn't sell the gun to Gus. You sold it to Ben Reich."

T8's face came back into the

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This remarkable Family Hospital Policy covers you and your family for about everything—for every kind of accident—and for all the common and rare diseases, and there are thousands of them, originating after the policy has been in force 30 days. Serious diseases that require hospitalization because of tuberculosis, cancer, heart disease, hernia, or diseases of the organs which are peculiar to women or sickness resulting in a surgical operation, Lumbago and Sacroiliac conditions are also covered if the cause originates six months after the effective date of the policy. Suicide, insanity, and venereal diseases are understandably excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no bidden meanings or big words in this policy. You can understand the coverage this policy offers because it is written in big type in words that mean exactly what they say. This new Family Hospital Plan has been developed by a fine 28-year-old established company with assets of $13,188,604.16 to render a real and necessary service to families of America. It is the kind of protection that will stand by you when emergency comes. We urge you and every family to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers so much for your $1.00 a month!

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70—with cash benefits so surprising they should have instant appeal for you. Think of it! When sickness or accident sends you to the hospital, you will want this new Family Protection Plan. It PAYS $100.00 PER WEEK—for a day, a month, even a year, or longer—just as long, in fact, as it's necessary to stay in the hospital. What a relief to know that you and your family could have this PROTECTION so that precious savings may be safeguarded and thus avoid going into debt! The money is paid directly to you—it's YOURS to use and spend as you wish. No strings attached—the company pays you welcome cash when you need it most for as long as hospitalization continues—and you or any insured member of the family may return to the hospital for sickness or accident as many times in the year as necessary without paying one cent additional premium.

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Sounds unbelievable—but it's true! NEW LOW COST for this wonderful family hospital protection is just 3¢ a day for each adult 18 to 59 and for ages 60 to 70 only 4½¢ a day. For children up to 18 years, the cost is only 1½¢ a day for each child! Naturally this policy is issued only to families and individuals now in good health—otherwise the cost would be sky-high. But once protected by this policy, you are covered for hospitalization for about every sickness and accident. Back of this policy are the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of the State of Nebraska, with policyholders in every state, and with assets of $13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951.

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There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling-by-mail is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we can offer so much protection to you for so little money.

MAIL COUPON

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Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days' Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

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light. "Then why'd you claim I bought it?"

"To get you here for a talk, Gus." He turned toward Church. "You had the gun, Jerry. Reich came here for it. You did business together before. I haven't forgotten the Chaos Swindle . . . "

"Damn you!" Church shouted.

"It swindled you out of the Guild," Powell continued. "You and Reich split close to half a million between you on that. As I recall, you offered your share to the Guild for reinstatement . . . "

"And you turned me down!"

"All I'm asking for is the gun," Powell said quietly.

"Are you offering a deal?"

"You know me, Jerry. Would I make a shady offer like that?"

"Then what are you paying for the gun?"

"You'll have to trust me to do the fair thing; but I'm making no promises."

"I've got a promise," Church muttered.

"You'll have to make up your mind—trust me or trust Ben Reich. What about the gun?"

Church's face disappeared from the light. After a pause, he spoke from the darkness. "I sold no gun, peeper, and I don't know how any gun was used. That's my objective evidence."

"Thanks, Jerry." Powell smiled, shrugged and turned again to T8. "I just want to ask you one technical question, Gus. Skipping over the fact that you're Ben Reich's accessory . . . "

"Wait a minute, Powell—"

"Keep it on the acoustical level, Gus, and don't get panicky. All I want to know is how Guild conditioning failed with you. You're a professional analyst and you might be able to locate the flaw in our processing before we break you."

"Break me? For what?" The calm assurance T8 found in Powell's mind, the casual acceptance of his ruin as an accomplished fact, jolted the little peeper.

"You'd better start looking for a good hockshop location. No, you could probably do better with a tea-leaf act. But while you're still a Guild member, I wish you'd devote some attention to your own case. How did we fail with you? At what level? I'd appreciate a report before you're dead."

"What do you mean, dead?"

"Exiled. Expelled. Look at Jerry. He's a picture of you after the next council meeting."

"You'll never prove anything. You'll—"

"You little fool. Haven't you ever been at a protested trial? Mr. Peetcy won't be handling your case. No, you stand before the board and T'sung-Hsai, @kins, Joyce, Chevisance, Vigo, Catzerie, Tudor-Franion—all 1sts—start probing. I tell you, you're dead."

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"Wait, Powell!" The mannequin face was twitching with terror. *"The Guild takes confession into account. When you get mixed up with a damned psychotic like Reich, you identify yourself with it. He came to me with a nightmare about a man with no face. He—"*

"He was a patient?"

"Yes. That's how he trapped me. But I'm out of it now. Tell the Guild I'm volunteering everything. Church is your witness . . ."

"I'm no witness," Church shouted. "You dirty squealer! After Ben Reich promised —"

"Shut up. You were crazy enough to trust Reich. I'll bust him first. I'll walk into court and sit on the witness stand and do everything I can to help Powell."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Powell snapped. "You're still in the Guild. Since when does a peeper squeal on a patient?"

"It's the evidence you need to get Reich, isn't it?"

"Sure, but I'm not letting any peeper disgrace the rest of us."

"It could mean your job if you don't get him."

"I want it and I want Reich . . . but not at this price. It takes guts to hold to the Pledge when the heat's on. You ought to know. You didn't have the guts."

"But I was an accessory!" T8 shouted. "You're letting me off. Is that ethics?"

"Look at him," Powell laughed. "He's begging for Demolition. No, Gus. We'll get you when we get Reich. But I can't get him through you. Don't forget that report."

He left the circle of light, walked through the darkness toward the front door. He had played the entire scene for this moment alone, but there was no action on his hook.

As Powell opened the door, Church suddenly called: "Just a minute."

Powell stopped, silhouetted against the cold street light. "Yes?"

"What have you been handing T8?"

"The Pledge, Jerry. You ought to remember it."

"Let me peep you on that."

"Go ahead." Most of Powell's blocks opened. What was not good for Church to discover was carefully jumbled and camouflaged.

"I don't know," Church said at last. "I can't make up my mind about you and Reich and the gun. God knows, you're a mealy-mouthed preacher, but I think maybe I'd be smarter to trust you."

"I told you I can't make any promises."

"Maybe the whole trouble with me is that I've always been looking for promises instead of —"

At that moment, Powell whirled and slammed the door. *"Get off*

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the floor! Quick!" He vaulted onto the counter. "*Up here with me!*"

A queasy greasy shuddering seized the pawnshop and shook it into horrible vibration. Powell kicked the light globe and extinguished it.

"*Jump for the ceiling light bracket and hold on. It's a harmonic gun. Jump!*" Church gasped and leaped up into the darkness. Powell gripped T8's shaking arm. "*Too short, Gus? I'll toss you.*"

He flung T8 upward and followed, clawing for the steel spider arms of the bracket. The three hung in space, cushioned against the murderous vibrations enveloping the store . . . vibrations that created shattering harmonics in every substance in contact with the floor. Glass, steel, stone, plastic all screeched and burst apart. T8 groaned.

"*Hang on, Gus. It's one of Quizzard's killers. Careless bunch. They've missed me before.*"

Destruction loomed up in the little peeper's subconscious. Powell knew that this was his crucial opportunity. T8's hands relaxed and he dropped to the floor. The vibrations ceased an instant later, but in that split-second Powell heard the burst of flesh. Church heard it too and raised steam for a shriek.

"*Quiet, Jerry! Not yet. Hang on!*"

"*D-did you hear him?*"

"*I heard. We're not safe yet. Hang on!*"

The pawnshop door opened a slit. A razor edge of light shot in and searched the floor. It found a broad red and gray organic puddle, then blinked out. The door closed.

"*They think I'm dead again. You can have your hysterics now.*"

"*I can't get down, Powell. I can't step on . . .*"

"*I don't blame you.*" Powell held himself with one hand, took Church's arm and swung him toward the counter. Church dropped and shuddered. Powell followed him, fighting hard against nausea.

"*Did you say that was one of Quizzard's killers?*"

"*Sure. He owns a squad of psycho-goons. They're Ben's deputies right now, though. Ben's getting panicky.*"

"*Ben Reich? But it was in my shop. I might have been here.*"

"*You were here. What difference did that make?*"

"*Reich wouldn't want me killed.*"

"*Wouldn't he?*" Image of a cat smiling.

Church took a deep breath. Suddenly he exploded: "The goddam son of a bitch!"

"Don't feel like that, Jerry. Reich's fighting for his life. You can't expect him to be too con-

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siderate of anybody else."

"Well, I'm fighting, too. Get ready, Powell. I'm going to give you everything."

AFTER he finished with Church and returned from headquarters and the T8 nightmare, Powell was grateful for the sight of the urchin in his home. Barbara D'Courtney had a black crayon in her right hand and a red crayon in her left. She was energetically scribbling on the walls, her tongue between her teeth and her dark eyes squinted in concentration.

"Baba!" he exclaimed in a shocked voice. "What *are* you doing?"

"Drawrin pitchith for Dada," she lisped.

"Thank you, sweetheart," he said. "That's a lovely thought. Now come and sit with Dada."

"No," she said, and continued scribbling.

"Doesn't my girl always do what Dada asks?"

She thought that over. "Yeth," she said. She deposited the crayons in her pocket, her bottom on the couch alongside Powell, her grubby paws in his hands.

"Really, Barbara," Powell murmured. "That lisping is beginning to worry me. I wonder if your teeth need braces."

The thought was only half a joke. It was difficult to remember that this was a woman seated alongside him. Slowly he probed through the paralyzed conscious levels of her mind to the turbulent preconscious, heavily hung with obscuring clouds, behind which was the faint, quaint flicker of light, isolated and childlike, that he had grown to like. But that flicker of light burned with the hot roar of a nova.

"Hello, Barbara. You seem to—"

He was answered with a brust of passion that made him scamper.

"Hey, Mary!" he called. "Come quick!"

Mary Noyes popped out of the kitchen. "You in trouble again?"

"Our patient's on the mend. She's made contact with her Id. Down on the lowest level. Almost had my brains burned out."

"What do you want? A chaperone? Someone to protect the secrets of her sweet girlish desires?"

"I'm the one who needs protection. Come and hold my hand."

"You've got both of yours in hers."

"Just a figure of speech." Powell glanced uneasily at the calm doll face before him and the cool relaxed hands in his. "Come inside with me."

He went down the black passages again toward the timeless reservoir of psychic energy, reasonless, remorseless, seething with

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the never-ending search for satisfaction. He could sense Mary Noyes cautiously following him. He stopped at a safe distance.

"Hi, Barbara."

Hatred lashed out at him.

"You remember me?"

The hatred subsided, to be replaced by a wave of hot desire.

"Pres, you'd better jet. If you get trapped inside that pleasure-pain chaos, you're gone."

"I'd like to locate something."

"You can't find anything in there except raw love and raw death, pure mindless instinct."

"I want her relations with her father. I want to know why he had those guilt sensations about her."

The furnace fumed over again. Mary fled.

Powell teetered around the edge of the pit like an electrician gingerly touching the ends of exposed wires. A blazing bolt surged near him. He stepped aside to feel a blanket of instinctual self-preservation wrap him. He permitted himself to be drawn

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down into a vortex of associations.

Here were the somatic messages, cell reactions by the incredible billion, organic cries, the muted drone of muscle tone, sensory sub-currents, blood-flow, the wavering superhetrodyne of blood *ph* . . . all whirling and churning in the balancing pattern that formed the girl's psyche. The never-ending make-and-break of synapses contributed a crackling hail of complex rhythms.

Powell caught part of Plosive image, followed it to the sensory association of a kiss, then by cross circuit to the infant's sucking reflex at the breast. Her mother? No. A wetnurse. Negation. Minus Mother. Powell dodged an associated flame of infantile rage and resentment, the Orphan's Syndrome. He searched for a related Pa . . . Papa . . . Father.

Abruptly he was face to face with his image. It was nude, powerful, its outlines haloed with an aura of love and desire.

Get lost. You embarrass me. The image disappeared. *Damn it! Has she fallen in love with me?*

"Hi, spook."

There was her picture of herself, pathetically caricatured, the blonde hair in strings, the dark eyes like blotches, the lovely figure drawn into flat, ungracious planes. It faded and the image of Powell - Powerful - Protective - Paternal rushed at him, torrentially destructive. The back of the head was D'Courtney's face. He followed the Janus image down to a blazing channel of doubles, pairs, linkages and duplicities to—yes, Ben Reich and the caricature of Barbara, linked like Siamese twins. B linked to B. B & B. Benedictine & Brandy. Barbara & Ben.

Half—

"Pres!"

A call far off, directionless. It could wait. That amazing image of Reich had to—

"Preston Powell! This way, you ass!"

"Mary?"

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"This is the third time I've tried to locate you!"

"The third time?"

"In three hours. Please, Pres, while I've got the strength."

He permitted himself to wander upward. The timeless, spaceless chaos roared around him. The image of Barbara D'Courtney appeared, now a caricature of the sexual siren.

"Hi, spook."

In a panic, he plunged away. Then the Withdrawal Technique went into automatic operation. The blocks banged down in steady sequence, each barrier a step backward toward the light. Halfway up, he sensed Mary alongside him. She stayed with him until he was once more in his living room, seated alongside the urchin.

"Mary, I located the weirdest association with Ben Reich. Some kind of linkage that—"

Mary had an iced towel. She slapped his face with it smartly. He realized that he was shaking.

"Only trouble is you aren't working with unit elements. You're working with ionized particles . . ." He dodged the towel and stared at Barbara. *"My God, Mary, I think this poor kid's in love with me."*

Image of a wistfully cockeyed turtledove.

"I kept meeting myself down there."

"And what about you?"

"Me?"

"Why do you think you refused to send her to Kingston Hospital?" she said. "Why have you been peeping her twice a day since you brought her here? Why did you have to have a chaperone? I'll tell you, Mr. Powell . . ."

"Tell me what?"

She stung him with a vivid picture of himself and Barbara D'Courtney and that fragment she had peeped days ago . . . the fragment that had made her turn pale with helplessly violent jealousy and anger.

"You're in love with her, and the girl isn't a peeper. She isn't even sane. I wish I'd let you stay inside her mind until you rotted!" She turned away and began to cry.

"Mary, for the love of—"

"Shut up," she sobbed. "There's a message for you. F-from headquarters. You're to jet for Ampro as s-soon as possible. Ben Reich's there. They need you. Everybody needs you. So why should I complain?"

—ALFRED BESTER

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